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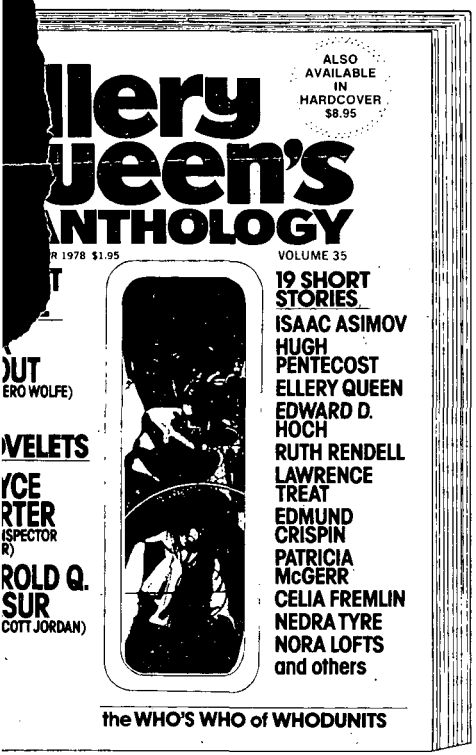

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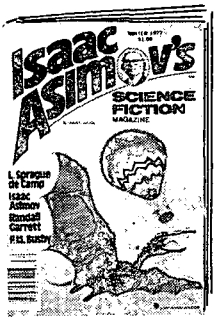

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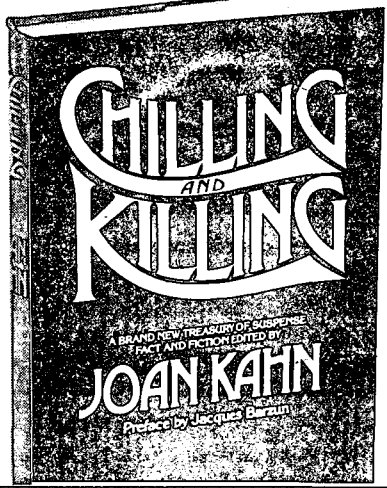

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a *NEW* short story by

BILL PRONZINI

A grave in the tule marsh, a heavy fog, a stranger, an escaped lunatic killer—a "who's who" chiller . . .

STRANGERS IN THE FOG

by BILL PRONZINI

Hannigan had just finished digging the grave, down in the tule marsh where the little saltwater creek flowed toward the Pacific, when the dark shape of a man came out of the fog.

Startled, Hannigan brought the shovel up and cocked it weaponlike at his shoulder. The other man had materialized less than 20 yards away, from the direction of the beach, and had stopped the moment he saw Hannigan. The diffused light from Hannigan's lantern did not quite reach the man; he was a black silhouette against the swirling billows of mist. Beyond him the breakers lashed at the hidden shore in a steady pulse.

Hannigan said, "Who the hell are you?"

The man stood staring down at the roll of canvas near Hannigan's feet, at the hole scooped out of the sandy earth. He seemed to poise himself on the balls of his feet, body turned slightly, as though he might bolt at any second. "I'll ask you the same question," he said, and his voice was tense, low-pitched.

"I happen to live here." Hannigan made a gesture to his left with the shovel, where a suggestion of shimmery light shone high up through the fog. "This is a private beach."

"Private graveyard, too?"

"My dog died earlier this evening. I didn't want to leave him lying around the house."

"Must have been a pretty big dog."

"He was a Great Dane," Hannigan said. He wiped moisture from his face with his free hand. "You want something, or do you just like to take strolls in the fog?"

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The man came forward a few steps, warily. Hannigan could see him more clearly then in the pale lantern glow: big, heavy-shouldered, damp hair flattened across his forehead, wearing a plaid lumberman's jacket, brown slacks, and loafers.

"You got a telephone I can use?"

"That would depend on why you need to use it."

"I could give you a story about my car breaking down," the big man said, "but then you'd just wonder what I'm doing down here instead of up on the Coast Highway."

"I'm wondering that anyway."

"It's safe down here, the way I figured it."

"I don't follow," Hannigan said.

"Don't you listen to your radio or TV?"

"Not if I can avoid it."

"So you don't know about the lunatic who escaped from the state asylum at Tescadero."

The back of Hannigan's neck prickled. "No," he said.

"Happened late this afternoon," the big man said. "He killed an attendant at the hospital—stabbed him with a kitchen knife. He was in there for the same kind of thing. Killed three people with a kitchen knife."

Hannigan did not say anything.

The big man said, "They think he may have headed north, because he came from a town up near the Oregon border. But they're not sure. He may have come south instead—and Tescadero is only twelve miles from here."

Hannigan gripped the handle of the shovel more tightly. "You still haven't said what *you're* doing down here in the fog."

"I came up from San Francisco with a girl for the weekend," the big man said. "Her husband was supposed to be in Los Angeles, on business, only I guess he decided to come home early. When he found her gone he must have figured she'd come up to this summer place they've got and so he drove up without calling first. We had just enough warning for her to throw me out."

"You let this woman throw you out?"

"That's right. Her husband is worth a million or so, and he's generous. You understand?"

"Maybe," Hannigan said. "What's the woman's name?"

"That's my business."

"Then how do I know you're telling me the truth?"

"Why wouldn't I be?"

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"You might have reasons for lying."

"Like if I was the escaped lunatic, maybe?"

"Like that."

The big man shifted his feet. "If I was, would I have told you about him?"

Again Hannigan was silent.

"For all I know," the big man said, "*you* could be the lunatic. Hell, you're out here digging a grave in the middle of the night—"

"I told you, my dog died. Besides, would a lunatic dig a grave for somebody he killed? Did he dig one for that attendant you said he stabbed?"

"Okay, neither one of us is the lunatic." The big man paused and ran his hands along the side of his coat. "Look, I've had enough of this damned fog; it's starting to get to me. Can I use your phone or not?"

"Just who is it you want to call?"

"Friend of mine in San Francisco who owes me a favor. He'll drive up and get me. That is, if you wouldn't mind my hanging around your place until he shows up."

Hannigan thought things over and made up his mind. "All right. You stand over there while I finish putting Nick away. Then we'll go up."

The big man nodded and stood without moving. Hannigan knelt, still grasping the shovel, and rolled the canvas-wrapped body carefully into the grave. Then he straightened, began to scoop in sandy earth from the pile to one side. He did all of that without taking his eyes off the other man.

When he was finished he picked up the lantern, then gestured with the shovel, and the big man came around the grave. They went up along the edge of the creek, Hannigan four or five steps to the left. The big man kept his hands up and in close to his chest, and he walked with the tense springy stride of an animal prepared to attack or flee at any sudden movement. His gaze hung on Hannigan's face; Hannigan made it reciprocal.

"You have a name?" Hannigan asked him.

"Doesn't everybody?"

"Very funny. I'm asking your name."

"Art Vickery, if it matters."

"It doesn't, except that I like to know who I'm letting inside my house."

"I like to know whose house I'm going into," Vickery said.

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Hannigan told him. After that neither of them had anything more to say.

The creek wound away to the right after 50 yards, into a tangle of scrubbrush, sage, and tule grass; to the left and straight ahead were low rolling sand dunes, and behind them the earth became hard-packed and rose sharply into the bluff on which the house had been built. Hannigan took Vickery onto the worn path between two of the dunes. Fog massed around them in wet gray swirls, shredding as they passed through it, reknitting again at their backs. Even with the lantern, visibility was less than 30 yards in any direction, although as they neared the bluff the house lights threw a progressively brighter illumination against the screen of mist.

They were halfway up the winding path before the house itself loomed into view—a huge redwood-and-glass structure with a wide balcony facing the sea. The path ended at a terraced patio, and there were wooden steps at the far end that led up alongside the house.

When they reached the steps Hannigan gestured for Vickery to go up first. The big man did not argue; but he ascended sideways, looking back down at Hannigan, neither of his hands touching the railing. Hannigan followed by four of the wood runners.

At the top, in front of the house, was a parking area and a small garden. The access road that came in from the Coast Highway and the highway itself were invisible in the misty darkness. The light over the door burned dully, and as Vickery moved toward it Hannigan shut off the lantern and put it and the shovel down against the wall. Then he started after the big man.

He was just about to tell Vickery that the door was unlocked and to go on in when another man came out of the fog.

Hannigan saw him immediately, over on the access road, and stopped with the back of his neck prickling again. This newcomer was about the same size as Vickery, and Hannigan himself; thick through the body, dressed in a rumpled suit but without a tie. He had wildly unkempt hair and an air of either agitation or harried intent. He hesitated briefly when he saw Hannigan and Vickery, then he came toward them holding his right hand against his hip at a spot covered by his suit jacket.

Vickery had seen him by this time and he was up on the balls of his feet again, nervously watchful. The third man halted opposite the door and looked back and forth between Hannigan and

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Vickery. He said, "One of you the owner of this house?"

"I am," Hannigan said. He gave his name. "Who are you?"

"Lieutenant McLain, Highway Patrol. You been here all evening, Mr. Hannigan?"

"Yes."

"No trouble of any kind?"

"No. Why?"

"We're looking for a man who escaped from the hospital at Tescadero this afternoon," McLain said. "Maybe you've heard about that?"

Hannigan nodded.

"Well, I don't want to alarm you, but we've had word that he may be in this vicinity."

Hannigan wet his lips and glanced at Vickery.

"If you're with the Highway Patrol," Vickery said to McLain, "how come you're not in uniform?"

"I'm in Investigation. Plain clothes."

"Why would you be on foot? And alone? I thought the police always traveled in pairs."

McLain frowned and studied Vickery for a long moment, penetratingly. His eyes were wide and dark and did not blink much. At length he said, "I'm alone because we've had to spread ourselves thin in order to cover this whole area, and I'm on foot because my damned car came up with a broken fanbelt. I radioed for assistance, and then I came down here because I didn't see any sense in sitting around waiting and doing nothing."

Hannigan remembered Vickery's words on the beach: *I could give you a story about my car breaking down.* He wiped again at the dampness on his face.

Vickery said, "You mind if we see some identification?"

McLain took his hand away from his hip and produced a leather folder from his inside jacket pocket. He held it out so Hannigan and Vickery could read it. "That satisfy you?"

The folder corroborated what McLain had told them about himself; but it did not contain a picture of him. Vickery said nothing.

Hannigan asked, "Have you got a photo of this lunatic?"

"None that will do us any good. He destroyed his file before he escaped from the asylum, and he's been in there sixteen years. The only pictures we could dig up are so old, and he's apparently changed so much, the people at Tescadero tell us there's almost no likeness any more."

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"What about a description?"

"Big, dark-haired, regular features, no deformities or identifying marks. That could fit any one of a hundred thousand men or more in Northern California."

"It could fit any of the three of us," Vickery said.

McLain studied him again. "That's right, it could."

"Is there anything else about him?" Hannigan asked. "I mean, could he pretend to be sane and get away with it?"

"The people at the hospital say yes."

"That makes it even worse, doesn't it?"

"You bet it does," McLain said. He rubbed his hands together briskly. "Look, why don't we talk inside? It's pretty cold out here."

Hannigan hesitated. He wondered if McLain had some other reason for wanting to go inside, and when he looked at Vickery it seemed to him the other man was wondering the same thing. But he could see no way to refuse without making trouble.

He said, "No, I guess not. The door's open."

For a moment all three of them stood motionless, McLain still watching Vickery intently. Vickery had begun to fidget under the scrutiny. Finally, since he was closest to the door, he jerked his head away, opened it, and went in sideways, the same way he had climbed the steps from the patio. McLain kept on waiting, which left Hannigan no choice except to follow Vickery. When they were both inside, McLain entered and shut the door.

The three of them went down the short hallway into the big beam-ceilinged family room. McLain glanced around at the fieldstone fireplace, the good reproductions on the walls, the tasteful modern furnishings. "Nice place," he said. "You live here alone, Mr. Hannigan?"

"No, with my wife."

"Is she here now?"

"She's in Vegas. She likes to gamble and I don't."

"I see."

"Can I get you something? A drink?"

"Thanks, no. Nothing while I'm on duty."

"I wouldn't mind having one," Vickery said. He was still fidgeting because McLain was still watching him and had been the entire time he was talking to Hannigan.

Near the picture window that took up the entire wall facing the ocean was a leather-topped standing bar; Hannigan crossed to it. The drapes were open and wisps of the gray fog outside pressed

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against the glass like skeletal fingers. He put his back to the window and lifted a bottle of bourbon from one of the shelves inside the bar.

"I didn't get your name," McLain said to Vickery.

"Art Vickery. Look, why do you keep staring at me?"

McLain ignored that. "You a friend of Mr. Hannigan's?"

"No," Hannigan said from the bar. "I just met him tonight, a few minutes ago. He wanted to use my phone."

McLain's eyes glittered slightly. "Is that right?" he said. "Then you don't live around here, Mr. Vickery?"

"No, I don't live around here."

"Your car happened to break down too, is that it?"

"Not exactly."

"What then—exactly?"

"I was with a woman, a married woman, and her husband showed up unexpectedly." There was sweat on Vickery's face now. "You know how that is."

"No," McLain said, "I don't. Who was this woman?"

"Listen, if you're with the Highway Patrol as you say, I don't want to give you a name."

"What do you mean, *if* I'm with the Highway Patrol as I say? I told you I was, didn't I? I showed you my identification, didn't I?"

"Just because you're carrying it doesn't make it yours."

McLain's lips thinned and his eyes did not blink at all now. "You trying to get at something, mister? If so, maybe you'd better just spit it out all at once."

"I'm not trying get at anything," Vickery said. "There's an unidentified lunatic running around loose in this damned fog."

"So you're not even trustful of a law officer."

"I'm just being careful."

"That's a good way to be," McLain said. "I'm that way myself. Where do you live, Vickery?"

"In San Francisco."

"How were you planning to get home tonight?"

"I'm going to call a friend to come pick me up."

"Another lady friend?"

"No."

"All right. Tell you what. You come with me up to where my car is, and when the tow truck shows up with a new fanbelt I'll drive you down to Bodega. You can make your call from the Patrol station there."

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A muscle throbbed in Vickery's temple. He tried to match McLain's stare, but it was only seconds before he averted his eyes.

"What's the matter?" McLain said. "Something you don't like about my suggestion?"

"I can make my call from right here."

"Sure, but then you'd be inconveniencing Mr. Hannigan. You wouldn't want to do that to a total stranger, would you?"

"*You're* a total stranger," Vickery said. "I'm not going out in that fog with you, not alone and on foot."

"I think maybe you are."

"No. I don't like those eyes of yours, the way you keep staring at me."

"And I don't like the way you're acting, or your story, or the way *you* look," McLain said. His voice had got very soft, but there was a hardness underneath that made Hannigan—standing immobile now at the bar—feel ripples of cold along his back. "We'll just be going, Vickery. Right now."

Vickery took a step toward him, and Hannigan could not tell if it was involuntary or menacing. Immediately McLain swept the tail of his suit jacket back and slid a gun out of a holster on his hip, centered it on Vickery's chest. The coldness on Hannigan's back deepened; he found himself holding his breath.

"Outside, mister," McLain said.

Vickery had gone pale and the sweat had begun to run on his face. He shook his head and kept on shaking it as McLain advanced on him, as he himself started to back away. "Don't let him do it," Vickery said desperately. He was talking to Hannigan but looking at the gun. "Don't let him take me out of here!"

Hannigan spread his hands. "There's nothing I can do."

"That's right, Mr. Hannigan," McLain said, "you just let me handle things. Either way it goes with this one, I'll be in touch."

A little dazedly, Hannigan watched McLain prod Vickery into the hall, to the door; heard Vickery shout something. Then they were gone and the door slammed shut behind them.

Hannigan got a handkerchief out of his pocket and mopped his forehead. He poured himself a drink, swallowed it, poured and drank a second. Then he went quickly to the door.

Outside, the night was silent except for the rhythmic hammering of the breakers in the distance. There was no sign of Vickery or McLain. Hannigan picked up the shovel and the lantern from where he had put them at the house wall and made his way down

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the steps to the patio, down the fogbound path toward the tule marsh.

He thought about the two men as he went. Was Vickery the lunatic? Or could it be McLain? Well, it didn't really matter; all that mattered now was that Vickery might say something to somebody about the grave. Which meant that Hannigan had to dig up the body and bury it again in some other place.

He hadn't intended the marsh to be a permanent burial spot anyway; he would find a better means of disposal later on. Once that task was finally taken care of, he could relax and make a few definite plans for the future. Money was made to be spent, particularly if you had a lot of it. It was too bad he had never been able to convince Karen of that.

At the gravesite Hannigan set the lantern down and began to unearth the strangled body of his wife.

And that was when the third man, a stranger carrying a long sharp kitchen knife, crept stealthily out of the fog . . .

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

READ ON, MACDUFF

by DOROTHY A. COLLINS

No stranger, I, to guns and knives
And murderous drives,
And snuffed-out lives;
I love to live precariously,
Provided it's done vicariously.

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a *NEW* Charlie Dark story by

BRIAN GARFIELD

Counterespionage agent Charlie Dark, overweight, over-age, but as resourceful as the devil, returns to action—this time to be given not a tough assignment but an impossible one—in other words, exactly the kind Charlie and his big ego like. A story of escape (we don't see many these days) from a newly independent African nation during "the terror" . . .

TRUST CHARLIE

by BRIAN GARFIELD

I said, "Either cover up that mirror or let's meet somewhere else."

Rice showed me his surprise, then pained impatience. "For Pete's sake, Charlie. It's an ordinary hotel room. Booked at random."

"I'm still alive after all these years because I'm a practising paranoid, all right?"

"For Pete's sake."

But we went down to the lobby and outside into the African sun, both of us in shirtsleeves against the heat. Rice sneered at me.

We walked past a rank of ten-year-old taxis. At the open stalls vendors were selling passion fruit and mangoes and coconuts and what-have-you, all of it clustered with flies. We crossed the central square, dodging a spotty traffic of cars and trucks and sagging overcrowded buses; an armored personnel carrier growled past carrying a dozen soldiers who held automatic rifles in casual positions. Two of the soldiers were laughing. Rice glanced up at the statue of the country's president and his sneer seemed to droop. Pedestrians moved lazily through the noxious smoke thrown around by the ill-maintained vehicles: it will be quite a while yet before Africa becomes pollution-conscious.

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Rice led me through a narrow passage and we emerged at the corner of a stone customs house that one of the colonial powers must have built long ago. It might have been the Germans or the Portuguese or the English—several nations had claimed the colony at various times; the building itself was too drab to identify its architects. Its walls were overgrown with bougainvillea.

We found a wooden bench under a palm tree. The earth sloped down toward a stone retaining wall that held back the sea—we had a good view across the crescent of the harbor. Coastal freighters were anchored out, lighters plying to and from them; there was a fair crowd of Indian Ocean junks, square sails furled. The saltwater smell was rich, pungent with raw sewage. A few people ambled past us (no one moved quickly in that heat), most of them Africans, some in tribal gear and others in burnouses and Western clothes; the occasional Asian, the even rarer European in flowered prints or khakis or department-store poplin safari outfits.

Rice favored me with a sour dry gaze. "Will this suit you?" We seated ourselves.

Then he smiled, putting as many teeth into it as an alligator, and I felt alarm. Rice seldom smiles except when he is anticipating or savoring someone else's misery.

"I see you've enjoyed your vacation. You've put on at least forty pounds—anything less wouldn't be noticeable on you. I really can't afford to let you off the leash this way. You'll eat yourself to death."

I was overweight to be sure, and over-age for that matter, but no more so than I'd been last time he'd seen me ten days earlier in Virginia. It was just his way of needling me. He never misses a chance. But that's fair because I loathe him too.

I said, "It was a good holiday until you cut it short. I've still got eleven days coming to me."

"Pull this off and you can have twelve."

"That tough, is it?"

"Tough? No, I wouldn't say it was tough. I'd say it's impossible."

"That's the kind I like." I grinned at him. "Anyway, it's desperate enough to get you out from behind your desk for the first time in I don't remember how long. What's the flap?"

He squirmed. "We're both on the line this time, I'm afraid."

"In other words you've dropped the ball and if I don't pick it up you'll be thrown out of the game. I've expected this, you know.

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Sooner or later you were destined to foul up. Have you ever considered washing cars for a living? You may just have enough talent for it."

"Let's save the catcalls for another time, Charlie. This is serious. It could mean my job—and you know what that would mean to you."

I did. If he goes I go. It's an agonizing symbiosis. He keeps his division and justifies his budget on the basis of results, and I'm the one who produces the results for him. If the job is too disagreeable for another division to tackle, then it's dropped in Rice's lap, and Rice in turn drops it in mine. Without me he's nothing; but I need the skunk because he's the only Section Chief who's willing to keep me on the payroll.

The computer kids try to retire me every 30 days because I'm too fat, I'm too old, I'm a disgrace to the corps, I don't fit the bright-young-man ivy-league image the boys would like to project, I'm arrogant and conceited, and I'm a lousy team player. I am old-fashioned. I flatly refuse to kill people. In sum, I would never pass the entrance requirements and the whiz kids consider me an eyesore, a joke and an embarrassment. They want me out. If it weren't for Rice I wouldn't have a job. I'd probably have to turn to crime to keep the juices flowing.

He said, "The flap is named August Brent. He's white—British parents but he was born here and he's a citizen, one of the few. Under the old colonial regime he had a key job in the colonial exchequer. Educated at the London School of Economics. Since independence he's been something like second-secretary to the Minister of Finance, some title like that—he's a white man, after all, so they couldn't very well give him a cabinet post; but the fact is, he's been running the ministry. Until the terror."

"And then?"

"When they started terrorizing the Asians and whites a few weeks ago he began to think about getting out. His mistake was in talking to too many people. The government got wind of his intentions to depart."

Rice looked out across the harbor. A graceful ketch was leaving under canvas; there was a racket of gulls. Soldiers in fatigues—armed—walked here and there by twos, quietly menacing.

Rice said, "He was packed and ready to leave. He went out to buy something—airsick pills, something innocuous like that.

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The soldiers hit his house while he was out. On his way home he spotted them and had time to get out of sight, but he knew the alarm was out, of course, and he made for the British Embassy but it was surrounded by troops. He backtracked and ended up on our doorstep. This was a week ago."

"The American Embassy?"

"Right. He demanded asylum. Threw himself on the Ambassador's mercy."

"Then they called you in."

Rice sighed. "I tried to bring him out, Charlie. I didn't want to disturb your vacation."

"Sure."

"I tried. I botched it. Is that blunt enough to satisfy you?"

"I'm tempted to gloat, sure enough."

"He's still there. In the Embassy. An acute embarrassment to everybody—British, Africans, Americans. I can't guess which of them hates him the most."

"Is he worth anything?"

"On the open market? Nothing. The inside secrets of the finances of a two-bit third-world nationlet—who cares? No. Two cents would buy him."

"Well, I guess the Ambassador must be a human being. Didn't want to throw the poor wretch to the wolves and all that. And anyhow we'd lose face if we reneged on the asylum. That it?"

"Acute embarrassment, yes. By protecting him we offend our African hosts; but by turning him loose we'd be welshing on a commitment. The British, of course, are laughing their heads off."

"Why do the Africans want him?"

"He betrayed them and he's getting away with it. They can't have that. They need to prove it's dangerous for anyone to cross them. Charlie, listen—all else aside, there's no doubt in my mind but that if we gave him back to the Africans he'd last forty-eight hours at the outside. An accident, of course."

The ketch dwindled toward the horizon, hoisting more sail. Rice said, "It's a dreary mess. The man's of no value, not even to himself. If we do get him out, what of it? At best he'll find some petty civil-service job in England. At worst he'll end up sleeping off cheap wine in alleys. Nobody cares about him—nobody needs to. He's a drip. But we have to try, don't we? We have to give him a chance."

"I suppose. How did you try to get him out?"

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"Laundry van. They searched it with bayonets. Pricked him pretty good. In the arm. We managed to hustle him back inside. A couple of shots were fired—no injuries but the Africans were pretty sore about it. They've quadrupled the guard around the Embassy. It's not rifles now, it's machine guns and riot troops. They're searching every vehicle and pedestrian that comes out of the building. You couldn't get a mosquito out of there now. I confess it's my fault—the laundry truck was my idea. We had a private jet waiting. It's only five minutes' flight across the border."

"Is the plane still available?"

"Yes."

"Then all we have to do is get him to the plane and he's home free."

"Sure. But if we try again and fail we'll be laughing-stocks from Johannesburg to Cairo. They'll tie a can to my tail. Yours too."

"Why not just leave him in there until the Africans find something else to occupy them?"

"No good. Every minute he remains in that building he's a thorn in both sides. He could become the flashpoint of a nasty international incident."

"So we have to get him out safely and soon."

"Soonest."

I stood up. "Let's have a look at the Embassy."

It had been Government House in colonial times, built in Cecil Rhodes' time—Empire, the raj, so forth. It had been built to impress. Now it had the slightly gone-to-seed look that creeps up on buildings in the tropics—a symptom of dampness and heat and termites: the lines seemed to sag and things had gone gray in patches and parts of it appeared to be crumbling; possibly it was a trick of the afternoon shadows.

It stood behind a high wrought-iron fence. There were palm trees, flame trees, acacias. Six Doric columns supported the high porte-cochère. American flag. Four Marines on duty at the gate.

The African troops slouched at intervals outside the fence. I counted 28 men, a half-track APC, two jeeps, and a radio truck; probably there were more behind the Embassy. I said drily to Rice, "I don't see anything those four Marines shouldn't be able to handle."

"These are hardly the days of the Panay in the Yangtze. But I'll admit there was something to gunboat diplomacy. Tell me, Charlie, did you actually serve under Teddy Roosevelt?"

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"Why, I did my boot training under George Armstrong Custer."

"That's what I thought."

A dusty bus drew up and decanted a camera-bedecked crowd of tourists, most of them Japanese, a few Americans and Europeans. The tour guide was a little man in sunglasses with a gray beard that looked as if rats had slept in it. From the color of his nose he was a drinking man. He said in a piping German-accented voice, "This way please, follow me," and led the tourists past the watchful Marines into the Embassy grounds.

I was astonished. "They just come and go like that?"

"Nobody wants to stop them. The country needs tourists desperately and this building's a landmark. Bismarck and Queen Elizabeth slept in it. Not, I assume, on the same night. Actually she was Princess Elizabeth then. They"—he was talking about the tourists now—"only see the public rooms on the ground floor, of course. No access to working Embassy areas. You need a pass, ID, and an armed escort to get past the doors. I think the tour groups visit twice a day. I heard part of the old German's spiel this morning. He's pretty good—an old Africa hand, used to hunt rhino with Selous when he was a boy."

We walked inside and had to clear ourselves with the Marine guard. The soldiers across the street watched balefully. We went through the main doors and passed through a series of interior checkpoints and finally entered a comfortable but not very large office whose occupant, like the government-green paint, was drab and in need of a touch-up. I knew him vaguely from past acquaintance: Oscar Claiborne, twenty-five-year man, passed over numerous times for promotion, assigned to one backwater job after another. Officially he was some variety of trade attaché; actually he was the Agency's stringer. One look at him and you yawned.

"Oscar, you know Charlie Dark."

We shook hands. Rice said to Oscar, "Sit-rep?" He deludes himself into thinking his clumsy use of jargon phrases will ingratiate him with the men in the field. Sit-rep, some years ago, used to be agency lingo for Situation Report.

Oscar said, "No change. He's in his room lying on his side, nursing the bad arm. Taking things calmly enough, I'll give him that."

I said, "How bad is the bayonet injury?"

"Superficial. It's healing nicely." Oscar beamed at me. "Hey, old buddy, how're things goin'?"

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"I'd like to talk to Brent," I said to Rice.

August Brent was undersized and sharp-featured and had a Cockney look. A monk's fringe of limp sandy hair ran around the back of his bald cranium. His speech was rapid and clipped, the English of a man born in Africa. I liked him well enough; he was too ingratiating but I attributed that to his obvious fear. I was glad to see he wasn't sweating unduly. That symptom is almost impossible to disguise.

We talked for a bit—I wanted him to warm to me. I needed his trust because he'd only go through with it if he believed I could be depended on. The scheme had occurred to me immediately and it was considerably less complex than many I'd tried.

Oscar Claiborne interrupted us and took me outside into the hall. "Bad news, I'm afraid. They've issued a fugitive execution warrant on him."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning he can be shot on sight. Legally."

"And they call this a freedom-loving democracy." I went in search of Rice.

In the Embassy cafeteria Rice brooded at me, watching with a sneer while I put away a big meal. All he had was coffee and all he said was, "I'll hand them one thing—it's fantastic coffee."

"They grow it here, dunce. You ever eat a coffee bean fresh off the bush before the packagers have got their hands on it? Sweet and delicious—like a chocolate drop. You used to be an actor, didn't you?"

He was startled and then suspicious. "You've been prowling in the files."

"No. Actually I saw you on stage once. Nineteen thirty-eight, I think. *The Cat and the Canary*. Summer stock—Woods Hole, wasn't it? You weren't too awful."

"My God. I was seventeen years old. How in hell did you—?"

"Do you still remember anything about theatrics?"

"I was a kid. It was forty years ago."

"But you may remember makeup techniques."

"Maybe. A little. I haven't thought about it. You figure to disguise yourself, Charlie?" His lip curled into a disbelieving grin and he surveyed my girth ostentatiously. "Sure, a little pancake

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here and there and you could pass for Clint Eastwood." He broke into rude laughter.

I gave him time to subside and said calmly, "We'll move him out tomorrow afternoon. Have the plane ready to go any time after two o'clock."

"How?"

"The guided tour."

"You're nuts. They search every one of those tourists as they leave the Embassy."

"I know. I want you to send people out to the hotels. Find every tourist in town who bears any resemblance, no matter how superficial, to our man. Small thin guys. Ask them to join the bus tour tomorrow afternoon. Give them free tickets, invite them to the Ambassador's party, appeal to their patriotism—do anything, just get 'em on that bus. I want six or eight small thin white men in the group."

"It won't work, Charlie. They *know* him."

"It's a black country." I smiled at him. "All whites look alike in the sunshine. Tell 'em to wear hats."

"They've been rolling up sleeves looking for that bayonet scab."

"Trust me."

"Listen, if he gets killed while he's supposed to be under our protection—"

"Just get me the tourists," I said. "And trust me."

I went back to August Brent's room to bolster his spirits with a pep talk. At first he was alarmed when I described the scheme. It took a while to reassure him. "It's the Purloined Letter technique. The one thing to remember is not to be furtive. If you're bold enough they'll never spot you. Just don't act scared, all right?"

Rice and I took turns coaching him most of the evening. In the morning I booked a ticket on the bus tour and rode the entire route, learning more than I needed to know about that steamy corner of the world, and by one o'clock I was back in the cafeteria eating lunch. The beef in Africa is terrible but the fruits are delicious.

I had made a deal with the man whose place Brent would take on the bus tour. It was costing us a sizable chunk of the division's budget but Rice didn't balk; he had more than money on the line. When the German guide led the afternoon group into the Embassy's front hall we were ready. I spirited our volunteer away from the group into a private office; Brent exchanged clothes and

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documents with him; careful application of makeup and false hair and we were set to go. I hardly recognized Brent myself—wouldn't have, if I hadn't known who he was. We gave him a few words of cheer and sent him out to join the tour.

Rice came outside with me to watch. Sweat stood out on his forehead. The tour filed out toward the bus and Rice tried to suppress a groan. Out of the side of his mouth he said, "It hasn't got a prayer, you damn fool."

The tourists filed past the Marines and then the African soldiers moved in, intercepting the queue. Rice's handkerchief came out and while he scrubbed his face I said, "Look at something else, damn it. Don't look so interested."

The soldiers were examining the first tourist, removing his hat and then tugging at his hair. They tested his mustache and examined his face with belligerent suspicion. He was one of the half-dozen tourists Rice had recruited—roughly Brent's size and build—and the soldiers' eyes were narrowed with cruel determination. They knew what it would mean to them if they should let Brent slip through.

They rolled up both the man's sleeves—apparently they weren't sure whether Brent had been wounded in the right arm or the left.

They passed the man through, finally, and two women and a Japanese, and then they went to work on the next slight-built white tourist. Rice's breathing rasped against the damp silence. At the bus the tour guide helped the two women up the steps and stood aside by the bus door, bored, cleaning his fingernails, smiling with absent politeness as each tourist climbed aboard. The soldiers grudgingly let the second white through, glanced cursorily at an Oriental woman and two adolescents, and zeroed in on our third volunteer tourist.

Rice said under his breath, "I never should have let you talk me into this. We're not going to make it. We'll never get away with it, Charlie. You and I will spend the rest of our miserable careers in a basement decoding signals from Liechtenstein. They're bound to catch him—they can't help but spot him."

"Trust me."

Nine tourists to go; then eight . . .

When we were airborne I unbuckled my seat belt and went jauntily past Rice's sour face to where August Brent sat peel-

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ing the phony hair off his cheeks. He beamed up at me and then winced when the spirit gum tugged at his flesh. I said, "Any plans?"

"I've got a job waiting. Writing opinion columns for a chain of newspapers on African affairs."

"Sounds good." Better than I'd expected for him. I went forward and loomed over Rice, knowing it made him uncomfortable to think that one lurch of the plane could capsize my bulk into his lap. I said, "You need to remind yourself of this lesson from time to time. It always pays to trust old Charlie Dark."

"They *had* to tumble to it. I still don't understand it."

"All those look-alike tourists, all Brent's size—they had to assume he was one of those. I knew it wouldn't occur to them to take a close look at a man they'd seen twice a day for years. Magician's trick, you know—you make a quick move that draws the eye to your right hand while the left hand quietly pulls the switch in plain view, but the audience never sees it. Nobody was going to look twice at that gray-bearded German tour guide with the shiny red nose. Simply put chinwhiskers on Brent and paint his nose . . ." I showed him my grin and pretended to lurch toward him. Rice's flinch elicited my laugh. I tweaked his nose and waddled toward the galley to see what they had to eat.

"Q"

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Thinking back, Edith Fenton could not recall ever having seen Charles Blanchard smile . . .

MR. BLANCHARD'S SECRET

by EMILY NEFF

"I don't believe there *is* a Mrs. Blanchard," Edith Fenton told her husband one night. "I think Mr. Blanchard murdered her and buried her in the garden."

Tom Fenton was used to his wife's extravagant flights of fancy. Nevertheless he looked up from his one-man chess game, mildly startled. "Who," he asked, "are the Blanchards?"

"I've *told* you about them. I've never seen *her*—that's just the point. *Mr.* Blanchard is in my car pool for day camp. His little boy is in Jerry's group."

"I don't know if I approve of a murderer driving Jerry to camp," he said dubiously.

"Don't laugh, Tom. I tell you there's something very strange about that family. I've picked up their child every Monday for six weeks and never laid eyes on the mother. It's always *Mr.* Blanchard who does the driving on their day."

"Maybe he's a widower."

"No, he speaks of his wife. Present tense."

"Maybe she doesn't drive. Maybe she's sick."

"Maybe. Oh, I realize there are a hundred perfectly good explanations, but I just have a feeling. You know, an instinct that something's wrong."

"I've always thought you could write fiction, if you'd try," Tom murmured, making a tentative move with a red bishop.

Edith sniffed impatiently. She hadn't really expected him to share her theory; in fact, she was sorry to have brought up the subject. Still, the mystery nagged at her mind.

Miss Hooper, the director, had approached her about the Blanchards on the first day of camp. "He's very nice. A professor. Just moved down here from Chicago. You live in the same section of town."

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Edith had already lined up a Mrs. Parker to share the chore of transportation, and she was glad to include the Blanchards—that would mean driving only one of the three days a week. She agreed.

"Grand, then it's settled," boomed Miss Hooper. "I'll give you their address."

At a quarter of nine that first Monday, with Jerry and the Parker boy in the back seat, Edith had driven to the house on Valence Street. It was a corner house, neat and nondescript. A man and a boy were waiting in the front yard.

"Mrs. Fenton?" the man asked, coming forward when she stopped the car. "I'm Charles Blanchard and this is my son, Charlie." Edith was pleased to see that the boy was a good-looking, healthy child, neatly dressed in shorts and T-shirt. He nodded his head briefly, picked up his canvas swimming bag, and climbed in the back with the others.

Edith said, "Glad you're with us, Charlie. Mr. Blanchard, will Fridays be convenient for your wife? Mrs. Parker wants to drive on Wednesdays, if possible."

"Perfectly satisfactory," he said, with a rather formal inflection. "Eight forty-five, prompt." He was a sober-faced man in his early forties, not tall, slenderly built, with an air of impenetrable gravity. *There's* a cold fish, Edith thought, as she drove off. I wonder what his wife's like.

At the discreet toot of a horn on Friday morning, Edith set down her coffee cup and followed Jerry out of the house to where the Blanchard car, a blue sedan, was waiting. I'll bet she's a typical faculty wife, she thought: thin, homely, and terribly intellectual. "Oh, hello there, Mr. Blanchard. I was expecting your wife."

"I'm pinch-hitting today," he explained. "I'm not teaching this summer, so I have some free time."

"Oh," she said awkwardly. "I see. How does this awful weather compare with Chicago? Don't you find it hot?"

"Not insufferably so," he said. "Chicago has its share of heat. Well, goodbye. My wife or I will bring the boys home at noon."

She watched the car move away, wondering why it was that he antagonized her so. Was his manner unfriendly—or was he merely shy and preoccupied, like so many bookish men? Or perhaps she was comparing him with Tom, who was open and friendly.

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Edith had a luncheon engagement, and when she got home Jerry was already back from camp. "How's your crawl stroke?" she asked him. "Did Charlie's mother bring you home? What's she like?"

"*He* brought us home," Jerry said. "My stroke's okay."

After the third week Edith gave up expecting to see the mysterious Mrs. Blanchard. By then it was established that the professor drove on Fridays, going and coming. And on Edith's day she never caught a glimpse of the woman when she drove to the Valence Street house.

Once or twice she asked Charlie casual questions about his mother. He was a nice boy, rather quiet, unusual only for his careful manners and precocious vocabulary. "You know, I've never met your mother, Charlie," she said one day. "She's not ill?"

"No," he said with surprise. "She's quite well, thank you."

"I don't suppose she goes out much, does she?"

"Not much."

His answers left her no wiser, and she could hardly press him further without appearing to pry. She detested adults who pumped children.

I'm turning into a regular busybody, she reproved herself. Why should I be so interested in Mrs. Blanchard—what difference does it make? But her imagination would take up where her information left off, and she would picture the professor's wife, small and pallid, banished into the shadows by her strange severe husband—a prisoner in her own home.

Perhaps Mrs. Blanchard was mad. Tom would hoot at that theory, she knew. And yet—was it so fantastic? Why had Blanchard come here from Chicago, anyway? For a better teaching position? Or to be among strangers?

Tom Fenton was staring at the chessboard, six moves ahead in his mind, when Edith interrupted him again. "I'm positively going to meet her tomorrow," she informed him. "It's inevitable."

Tom's strategy fell apart and he looked at his wife with distinct annoyance. "Meet who?"

"Mrs. Blanchard."

"I thought she'd been murdered."

"Be serious, Tom. Really, you can't imagine how curious I am. But she'll have to show herself tomorrow—she can't get out of it. It's the last day of camp, and they're giving a party for the mothers."

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Tom looked fondly at his wife. "You know, Edie, you're going to be awfully disappointed when you do meet Mrs. What's-her-name. She'll turn out to be a perfectly ordinary woman—then how'll you feel?"

"Not ordinary. Not Mrs. Blanchard."

"Why not? My guess is that she simply doesn't like to drive, and her husband is nice enough to take her car-pool turn for her. You're building this thing up from nothing."

"Maybe you're right," Edith admitted. Nevertheless, she spent the next morning anticipating the camp party with more impatience than she usually felt for such affairs. The sky was dark and there was a high wind, and for a while she was afraid a storm would cancel the program, but the threatening weather subsided after a mild sprinkle of rain, and by the time she reached the campsite at eleven o'clock the sun was shining.

Jerry met her and dragged her through the crowd of milling mothers and sunburnt children to admire his craft work—a beaded belt and a smeared blueprint of oak leaves. A little girl in a plaid playsuit thrust a cup of greenish punch into her hand, and Miss Hooper cornered her to say what an exemplary camper Jerry had been.

She finally sighted Mrs. Parker, who was examining the leather work, and asked if she'd seen Mrs. Blanchard.

"No, is she here?" inquired Mrs. Parker with interest. "To tell you the truth, I've never *seen* the woman. Does she exist?"

Edith felt an instant bond with Mrs. Parker. "I've been wondering the same thing," she said. "I wouldn't know her if I saw her. Isn't she with Charlie?"

"I haven't seen Charlie."

Edith tracked down Miss Hooper and questioned her.

"Charlie Blanchard? Oh, he didn't come. When the weather looked so bad, his father phoned. I guess those Yankees aren't used to our big winds." She whinnied indulgently. "A shame the child missed the party. And he did such nice handwork." She looked at Edith. "Could you take his things home to him? It would be a big help."

"Of course," Edith said. "I'll be glad to."

After forcing down the punch and a rubbery piece of cake, she had Jerry collect Charlie's trophies along with his own, and they drove home. Later that afternoon she would descend on the Blanchards. She would have a bona-fide reason for calling on Mrs.

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Blanchard, and she intended to use it.

But she had hardly finished washing the lunch dishes when Jerry ran into the kitchen. "Charlie's mother's here. She came to get his stuff. Where did you put it?"

"Charlie's mother? Are you sure?" Edith wiped her hands hastily and followed him through the house. Was it possible? She felt oddly nervous.

The woman in the front hall was so different from Edith's mental picture of Mrs. Blanchard that she found herself staring at her stupidly, unable to speak. She looked a good ten years younger than her husband, black-haired and slender, with a rose-colored linen dress and gold bracelets on her slim wrists.

"I'm Celia Blanchard," she said with a friendly smile. "I just telephoned Miss Hooper and she said you'd been kind enough to bring Charlie's things home. He was distressed to miss the party, but the weather looked so bad earlier—the TV said something about a hurricane in the Gulf and Charles and I were frantic."

"Those winds can be frightening, I know," Edith said, recovering herself. "Won't you come in? Jerry, get Charlie's things for Mrs. Blanchard, will you?"

"I can only stay a minute," Mrs. Blanchard said, with an embarrassed laugh. "Charles doesn't know I'm here, and he might worry. He's a terrible fussbudget."

In the living room Edith sat beside her guest on the sofa and marveled at the wild notions she had conceived about this attractive person. Glancing at the neatly lacquered nails, the white sandals, the smooth black hair, she felt that she must look very plain and housewifely by comparison. "You know, I'd almost given up meeting you," she admitted lightly. "I'd begun to wonder if there *was* a Mrs. Blanchard."

"Oh, really?" the other laughed. "I've been wanting to meet you, too. There just never seemed to be . . . an opportunity." She took a cigarette from her purse and reached for the silver table-lighter that stood on the coffee table, flicking it into flame with her slim quick fingers. "What a pretty lighter—and it works, too. I'm sorry—cigarette?"

"Thanks, no," Edith said, pushing an ashtray closer. "I can't get over it; I had a totally different idea of what you would be like. You know, you build up a picture in your mind of a person you've never met—often quite wrong. My husband says I have too much imagination."

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She was thankful Tom wasn't here—he would never stop ribbing her for picturing Mrs. Blanchard as a poor demented creature locked in a closet—or worse. She decided not to tell him about this visit at all.

Jerry entered with a handful of objects made of wood, leather, and metal, which Mrs. Blanchard took into her lap, sorting through them with small exclamations of pleasure. "Oh, aren't they interesting? What is this thing—a bracelet or a napkin ring? Anyway, it's charming. I'm so proud of Charlie."

"You should be. Miss Hooper said he did fine work. You must bring him to play with Jerry someday. Perhaps you could stay for lunch," she added impulsively. "It must be lonely for you here after Chicago."

"Oh, it is—you can't imagine. I'd like to come. I love your house, you have such pretty things. I love pretty things." Her dark eyes roved around the room. "I don't know many people yet, so I don't go out much. Besides, Charles likes to have me at home with him."

Suddenly Edith realized that here was the answer to the mystery of Mrs. Blanchard. The professor was psychopathically jealous. He wanted to keep his beautiful wife all to himself. He didn't *want* her to meet new people. She had heard of such cases, particularly when the husband was older, and she felt a sudden surge of pity for the young woman before her. What a dreadful life she must lead, tied to that possessive, somber man. Thinking back, Edith could not recall ever having seen him smile.

"You must come," she told Celia Blanchard warmly. "I insist on it. I'll get in touch with you soon."

Mrs. Blanchard stamped out the stub of her cigarette and gathered her son's camp articles together. "That's very kind of you," she smiled, getting to her feet. "Now I really must go. Thank you again."

Edith walked to the car with her and watched her drive away, flashing a gold bracelet as she waved goodbye. She re-entered the house slowly and finished putting away the lunch things, her thoughts on her recent guest.

It was perhaps twenty minutes later that the phone rang and she was surprised to hear Mr. Blanchard's voice. "My wife says she was at your house a short while ago, Mrs. Fenton. Is that correct?"

Couldn't she leave his sight without having him check on her?

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It was unbelievable. "That's correct," Edith said rather sharply. "Do you object?"

He sounded tired and strained. "Are you missing anything, by chance?" he asked.

"What do you mean? Of course not."

"An urn-shaped table lighter? Silver?"

From where she sat at the telephone, Edith could see the coffee table, and her glance swept over its surface quickly. The lighter was gone. Somehow she couldn't find her voice to tell him so.

After several moments of silence he said wearily, "I'm sorry this had to happen. I'll see that you get it back." There was a tone of resignation in his voice, as if he had lived through this humiliation many times.

Edith replaced the receiver quietly, and covered her face with her hands.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

LADIES' MAN

by R. C. SHEBELSKI

"Not guilty," insisted one crook
With his hand outstretched on the Book.
"I've been collared by men
And served time in the pen,
But this time I was plainly Ms. took!"

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DEPARTMENT OF THIRD STORIES

Here is the third adventure of Professor Paul Engel, an amateur detective of the old school, and his bookseller Boswell, the skeptical Harry. The Professor's method is to apply "pure reason to the facts"—analyzing, speculating, and "imagining." Like the first two tales of deduction in this series, "Imagine a Murder" is "classical in concept and execution," with the added excitement of a locked room. . .

IMAGINE A MURDER

by ROBERT C. SCHWEIK

I had shut the window of my bookstore against a sudden chill wind that foretold the coming of a summer storm and was sitting in the cluttered back room which served as my office, dutifully writing up an order for three copies of a bulky volume fetchingly titled *Principles for the Interpretation of Type-Batter Evidences in Analytical Bibliography*. An autographed copy lay on the desk before me, the gift of Professor Paul Engel, who at the moment was rummaging through a half dozen cartons of musty books I had recently acquired at one of those day-long household auctions that were major social events in little upstate Northfield.

I confess I was flattered that Paul had taken the trouble to walk all the way down from the State College just to present me with a copy of his latest book, and I had slipped easily into the role that by now I knew our friendship required me to play on such occasions. I might have won an award for the convincing imitation of interest I gave as I leafed through a tediously minute account of the daily activities of some mysterious "Compositor B"; although there was one moment when I almost gave myself away by nearly laughing outright as Paul began talking earnestly about the importance of imagination in bibliographic research. God knows I've never been able to detect the slightest trace of imagination in his writings!

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But of course in the end it seemed obligatory to say that I'd order some copies for the store—painfully aware that even a token stock of Paul's latest book would surely remain a permanent fixture, along with the three copies of his *Problems and Practices in Machine Collation* which had been quietly gathering dust on a back shelf for the past three years.

I was writing up the order when George Markham called. Markham was a state auditor from Albany, temporarily assigned in Northfield to oversee a review of the college accounting procedures. At the time he was, so to speak, my landlord. That gracious old Victorian house I leased when I first moved to Northfield had recently been condemned by the Village Board, to be torn down to make room for a new fire station, and I had sublet part of Markham's flat while I searched for permanent lodgings.

Markham's advertisement had attracted me because his apartment was conveniently located a few blocks from my bookstore, in a housing complex built by the college for faculty and staff members; but I soon found that staying with him was like rooming in an accounting firm. I doubt that I have ever met anyone who so totally lived his profession as Markham: he had elaborately outfitted his bedroom as a home office, complete with full-size calculating machine, dictaphone, and one of those fancy ball-style IBM electric typewriters, and there he spent nearly every evening and weekend, clattering away, despite my complaints, till well past midnight.

There seemed to be simply no getting away from it; even Markham's dinner conversations were invariably monologues about the audits he was performing, usually larded with hints of fiscal skulduggery he claimed to be uncovering in everything from the President's office to the apartment-complex accounts.

On the phone Markham remained true to form. The flimsy excuse he gave for calling was to ask whether I would be having dinner in the apartment that evening, but he turned almost at once to what I guessed was the real purpose of his call.

"Finally got that apartment business nailed down, Harry," he said, talking in that whispered conspiratorial way of his in which he somehow assumed I would know all about whatever he was hinting at. "Confronted him last week with the special report I've been compiling, and this morning finished typing up the report that goes to Audit and Control in Albany. Believe me, he'll be getting a jail sentence out of this."

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I hadn't the foggiest idea whom Markham was talking about this time, and really didn't care, but apparently the "Uh-huh" I muttered was not indifferent enough to discourage him.

"Listen," he continued earnestly, "the main thing is to move quickly on this now; I'm not about to wait till Monday to get to the office Xerox machine, and anyway I've got a copy here I could use to reconstruct what I've written if I really had to. Do me a favor, will you, Harry? I've left the report in an envelope sticking out of our mailbox in the lobby; when you come home for dinner will you be a good fellow and take it right over to the post office before you come up?"

That was Markham! In a hurry to put some poor devil in jail, but not willing to leave his calculator long enough to take the evidence to the post office.

I mumbled another "Uh-huh," now scarcely bothering to conceal my annoyance, and was about to hang up when I heard an odd tapping noise on the phone.

"Hold it a second, Harry," Markham said quickly, and before I could object I heard him putting the receiver down.

So there I sat, waiting impatiently and pondering whether I should simply hang up, when I was jarred by the sound of a sharp explosion, followed by a crash, and then an ominous silence.

Of course there was no way of knowing what had happened, and I wasted minutes shouting "George! George!" into the phone until I began to hear people banging on the apartment door and muffled voices shouting "Markham, are you all right?" from out in the hall.

I got Paul to look after the bookstore and set out, half walking, half running toward the apartment. A police cruiser was already parked in front when I arrived, and in the distance I could hear the siren-wail of an approaching ambulance. By pushing my way partly through the small knot of apartment residents gathered at the open doorway, I managed to catch sight of Markham, lying in the middle of our tiny living room, his face drenched with blood. It was only later, during an interview with a man from the County Coroner's office, that I learned some of the details of what had happened.

Markham had died almost instantly of a gunshot wound; he had been struck near his right eye by a small-caliber bullet that had shattered his eyeglasses and driven fragments of lead, glass, and bone into his brain.

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When Markham's body was finally trundled out, completely covered and firmly strapped to a stretcher, I was dimly aware that there would be funeral arrangements to make and that I should call his brother who lived on Long Island; but first it seemed important to report what I had heard over the phone.

By now the little crowd had moved down the hall a bit to where a detective with a notebook was taking statements. It seemed to me that what I had to tell was worthy of special attention, and, after all, it was my apartment too—so I went straight up to the door and knocked. The door jerked open and I was faced by a grim-looking uniformed policeman. Over his shoulder I could catch glimpses of a detective busily pulling cushions from the living-room sofa while another man crouched over the telephone receiver, dusting it with a little brush.

My story brought a gratifying flurry of activity: I was ushered in, the man at the door was dispatched to the lobby, and the detective disappeared into Markham's room where I heard him conferring with someone who was already rummaging about there. I began to feel myself the center of attention until the officer returned from the lobby empty-handed. Then the mood of the room changed; there was a hastily whispered conference, more going and coming, and finally the detective I had first spoken to returned and began questioning me in a persistently puzzled way.

"You're sure you didn't take the envelope in the lobby?"

"I'm sure. I already told you I was in a hurry."

"Mr. Markham mentioned a copy, you say. Are you sure he spoke about a copy being *here*?"

"I'm pretty sure he said that," I responded, now beginning to doubt my own memory.

"Do you know where he might have put it?"

"In one of his drawers, I suppose. He was a very tidy man."

The detective looked at me dubiously. Out of the corner of my eye I caught sight of a welcome face—that of George Greaves, a police lieutenant who shared my enthusiasm for a regular Friday-night poker club we belonged to; he came out of Markham's room frowning, then headed for the kitchen where I heard him opening cupboards and clattering about with dishes and pans. All the while I continued to answer questions that seemed to go in circles.

"Mr. Markham told you he wrote a report that would put someone in jail? Did he say who?"

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"He never mentioned a name."

"But you're sure he said he'd have a copy here in the apartment?"

"That's what I remember—something he could reconstruct the report from, I think he said."

And so it went until at last my questioner hunched his shoulders in a mute gesture of resignation and went off into Markham's room where I could hear more opening and closing of drawers. There was still another round of questions, this time with a man from the coroner's office, and after that I must have waited another hour before the police began to leave. George Greaves was last, and as he was heading for the door I called to him in my best we're-just-a-couple-of-poker-buddies way: "Hey, George, just between us, what's it all about? You can trust me."

Greaves seemed to ponder for a moment whether or not he could, then came back and slouched wearily on the sofa.

"Look, Harry," he began, "this thing has really got me. You already know we can't find the envelope Markham talked about, and you've probably guessed that there's no sign of a copy of his report anywhere in the apartment. Even the wastebaset in his room was nearly empty."

I recalled the obsessive tidiness with which Markham would walk down the hall to the apartment incinerator chute, clutching a wastebasket only a quarter full.

"Maybe he made a record on his dictaphone," I ventured, "or there was a tape recorder or something—"

"We've already checked all that," Greaves interrupted impatiently. "And besides, that's not the main problem. What really bothers me, Harry, is that we can't tell *how* he was shot. There's a ladder up against the back wall of the apartment, next to the living-room window, and at first we thought whoever shot Markham had got in and out that way; but the window was closed and locked on the inside—in fact, the entire apartment was buttoned down. Even the door was locked with a deadbolt that could only be operated from the inside."

I glanced over to the door where the splintered wood around the frame testified that it had been broken in.

"Officer Rowan forced the door," Greaves said in answer to my silent question, "and while he did there was already a small crowd in the hall. He swears that no one could have come in or out that way—but there just isn't any other way either. That's

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why at first we thought of suicide."

I recalled my telephone conversation with Markham and began shaking my head.

"I know, Harry, I know," Greaves went on. "Anyway, how could Markham have shot himself in the head, died instantly, and then hidden the gun?"

I looked around the little apartment living room, thinking momentarily that surely something had been overlooked. Greaves saw what was on my mind.

"Harry, we've literally looked everywhere—checked the cabinets, the light fixtures, the furniture, the bedding, the rugs, the toilet—everything; there's simply no place in this apartment that could conceal a weapon that we haven't checked. No killer, no gun, and no trace of any copy of a report."

When I saw Greaves to the door he gave a quick look back—as if he felt that one more inspection of the apartment would solve his problem. As I watched him trudge slowly down the stairs, I began to feel sorry for him; there would be incredulous superiors to convince, and explanations that could not be put off indefinitely.

I was standing by the closed door, pondering Greaves's awkward situation, when the doorbell startled me. I think for a moment I had a panicky feeling that Markham's killer might have been waiting for the police to leave and now had returned; anyway, I know I felt something like a wave of relief when I caught sight of Paul Engel's grizzled beard through the peephole in the door.

Paul entered, waving my bookstore keys as if to explain why he had come. Behind him, standing hesitantly at the door, was one of Paul's colleagues, Tristram Barnard, who lived in the next-door apartment; he was staring as if transfixed by the bloodstain visible on the rug where Markham had fallen.

"Tris just told me Markham committed suicide," Paul began. "I can guess what a time you've had, Harry, so I won't stay; just came to bring your keys to the store."

"As a matter of fact, I'd like some company right now," I replied. "You, too, Tris—come in."

Barnard came in almost reluctantly. "I heard it," he said, more to himself than to us. "It sounded like an explosion in here. I ran out into the hall, and so, I guess, did everybody else. When Markham wouldn't answer, I knocked on the manager's apartment

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across the hall and he brought out his masterkey; but we still couldn't get in until the police came and used a crowbar. He was lying right here."

"Markham didn't exactly commit suicide," I said, not knowing how much of what Greaves told me I could reveal.

Paul looked both puzzled and faintly amused. "How do you not exactly commit suicide?" he asked with a smile.

Well, of course I was bursting to tell what I knew, and somehow, not really wanting to, I gradually spilled the whole story, all the while repeating warnings not to reveal what Greaves had told me. It was a pretty good story, I thought, but the reaction I got was disappointing. Barnard seemed preoccupied with the stain on the carpet, and Paul, in his intense and restless way, prowled around the apartment, poking into Markham's room, peering out into the hall, and looking out the back window.

"Well, what do you think about it?" I asked triumphantly when I had finished.

There was just a touch of condescension in Paul's voice as he called out from somewhere in Markham's room: "That's the trouble with Greaves—he's got no imagination."

What monumental arrogance! I thought of all the effort Greaves had gone to and lashed back at Paul: "Talk about imagination! Greaves probably has more in his little finger than you managed to put in that whole book of yours!"

Paul emerged from Markham's room with a pained expression on his face. "Have you ever thought what it's like to have to visualize the activities in a Renaissance printer's shop?" he began. "Don't you see how much—"

He stopped himself and took another tack. "All right, Harry. What would you say if I could supply a copy of the report Markham wrote, show you the weapon that killed him, and identify the killer?"

"That sounds more like delusions of grandeur than imagination," I laughed. "If you could do even half of that I'd—"

I hesitated, trying to think of something sufficiently improbable.

"How about doing the one thing you've obviously never done before?" Paul challenged.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Read one of my books!"

For a moment I thought I might continue to taunt him by say-

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ing something about cruel and unusual punishment, but Paul sometimes had a way with puzzles that gave me pause.

"You've got yourself a bet," I finally replied. "Let Tris here be the judge—and if you lose, you buy me dinner tonight at the Northfield Hotel."

"Agreed," Paul said, smiling. "And you too, Tris," he added to Barnard who had finally shifted his attention from the stain on the rug and was now listening intently. Paul headed back to Markham's room, talking as he went.

"First, consider that copy Markham spoke of. Of course it couldn't be an ordinary carbon copy because he talked about being able to 'reconstruct' the report from it only if he had to. I suspect this is what he meant."

Paul came out of Markham's room carrying a small gray plastic case with two semicircular bulges.

"Here's the ribbon cartridge from Markham's typewriter. What Greaves didn't notice is that Markham's machine doesn't use an old-fashioned cloth ribbon; instead, it employs a thin plastic ribbon that goes through the typewriter only once, and each time a letter is struck the carbon comes off the plastic and leaves a clear imprint of the letter on the ribbon. If Markham had really needed to recover some details of his report, he could always have turned to this."

As he spoke, Paul gingerly pulled a small portion of the tape out of the cartridge and held it to the light; all I could make out was a jumble of letters that looked like this:

```
ttr.antltsldaoyiaemleehtnJhcdedotp
aeuseesenrldshtfhrdzbssahttnisirre
hgIrytahiaonutfntoezmaeYoaeevevpor
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"What makes you think you can learn anything from that?" I objected. "It's about as clear as alphabet soup!"

"Leave it to Markham to have the latest and most complex model," Paul muttered as he squinted at the tape; "but if you examine this *imaginatively,* you can visualize what happens as it goes through the typewriter. See, it must move from left to right in half spaces, and, at the same time, shift up in two stages, and then down again, in order to maximize the number of letters that can be typed on it. To read it all we have to do is start on the

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right at the bottom, follow up on a slight leftward diagonal to the letter at the middle, then to the top row; then drop down again to the second letter from the right on the bottom, go up that diagonal, and continue across the ribbon from right to left that way. Now, look what we've got here." Paul followed the letters along with his finger as he read:

"report provides evidence that John Yates has embezzled more than fifty thousand dollars in the last ten years. I urge that"

"Are you sure it reads *Yates*?" I asked. "He's the apartment manager—the man who has the flat across the hall. How could he be embezzling all that money?"

"Just imagine what possibilities there are," Paul replied. "Kickbacks from contractors, falsification of rent receipts—why, there's more than enough to account for five thousand a year. But Markham's report will document all that," Paul continued. "The important thing is that we've now got the name of a man with a motive for killing him—and certainly opportunity to filch the envelope in the lobby if a glance at the address made him think it was the report Markham had threatened him with."

"Well, that explains it!" exclaimed Barnard suddenly. "I wondered why I had to pound on Yates's door to get the masterkey You'd have thought with all that noise he would have come running—but if he was deliberately trying not to be around the murder scene—"

"But Markham was killed in his room, not in the hall," I objected. "How could Yates have done that and been in his room at the same time?"

"Well, that's where *imagination* comes in again," Paul replied, and I noticed with annoyance that now he smiled slightly every time he used the word. "Imagine that when the door to Markham's apartment was forced, the living-room window had been open, or at least unlocked. What would the police have concluded?"

"That the killer used the ladder and had come and gone that way, of course," I answered impatiently. "Greaves told me that much himself."

"Fine," replied Paul smoothly. "Now imagine that Yates had counted on the police making precisely that interpretation. There would surely be no problem for him to put the ladder there. But just at the moment when he could not have known it, something went wrong—Markham closed the window."

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"That's very imaginative, Paul," I said mockingly, "but why stop there? Why not imagine that the killer just flew in and out the closed window?"

"Not very funny, Harry," Paul rejoined, "and as usual you miss the point. There's a logical basis for what I'm asking you to envision. Now think, just before Markham called, do you remember what *you* did?"

"I was writing up that order for— Wait a minute. Just before that I closed the bookstore window! There was that chill—"

"Exactly," Paul interrupted. "And so, please, imagine Markham doing the same, and locking the window for good measure. Quite like him, I'd think. But in doing that he turned what would have been a nearly foolproof murder into a puzzle that has forced us to see our way to the real solution. I wonder if Markham would have appreciated that irony?"

"He wasn't the kind to enjoy irony," I mused, "but I still don't see any solution either. Where's the gun that killed Markham?"

"There is no gun," Paul replied.

"What do you mean?" I half shouted. "The coroner's man told me himself that Markham was shot."

"Of course he was shot," Paul went on evenly, "but not with a gun. From what you read about city gangs, Harry, you should know a .22 can be fired from nothing more elaborate than a piece of tubing taped to a wooden stock. I think Yates simply used a variant of the zip gun to kill Markham."

"Where is it then?" I objected. "And anyway, how could Yates have gotten in and out of the apartment with it?"

"He didn't need to," Paul went on. "He used the tube of the peephole in the apartment door."

I glanced over at that little brass ring in the door and recalled I had looked through it just before Paul came in. He seemed to anticipate my next question.

"Of course you can see through it, Harry; but the point is what you can see. If the wide-angle lens were in it you should be able to see nearly everything in the hall. But, while you were telling me about Markham, I peeked out through the hole and was surprised to find that it was like looking through an empty tube. At the time I only thought to myself that the lens was missing—but before you had reached the end of your story I realized that I had been looking down the barrel of the murder weapon."

I felt annoyed at myself for not having noticed that earlier,

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when I had looked through it and caught only a glimpse of Paul's beard. Still, I couldn't see how Yates had used it as a gun.

"For an apartment manager it would pose no great problem," Paul went on. "With his masterkey, entrance to your apartment was easy during weekdays when you both were out. All Yates had to do was to buy another peephole tube from any hardware store and make the necessary adjustments—break out the lens with a heavy nail, check to see what size bullet would fit the tube, and perhaps even try it out, maybe in the basement, clamped in a vise, possibly with a pillow as an impromptu silencer. He probably substituted the peephole tube for yours some time yesterday. And suppose he had been seen doing that? What would be more innocent than the apartment manager making some minor repair for a tenant?"

"But how do you fire—" I began.

"All that's really needed is something to strike a sharp blow on the rim of the cartridge—a screwdriver hit by a hammer, for instance, or the edge of a heavy chisel."

Then, all at once, I could see it: Yates poised at our door, able to see enough through the little tube to know when Markham was approaching; making some unusual noise to attract his attention and tempt him to come to peek out in the hall; then, hastily inserting the cartridge, waiting the exact moment to strike, and—

"Of course Yates jumped right back across the hall into his apartment," Paul went on. "And then he had little to worry about. He could count on the confusion in the hall—after the door was opened and a crowd gathered. He could have casually put his hand up on the door, used a nail or something like it to poke the shell casing out of the tube, then slipped it unnoticed into his pocket. And that's all there was to it—or would have been, if Markham hadn't closed his window."

"But do you think there's enough evidence to convict him?" I asked.

"Well, there's Markham's report, and there'll be a ballistics analysis, I should think," Paul answered. "And, of course, if I'm right about his substituting a different peephole, there's a good chance his fingerprints will be found on the outside of the tube when it's removed from the door."

"I think I should call Greaves," I said.

"The sooner the better," Paul urged.

It took some doing to convince Greaves I was serious. "He's

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coming over," I was finally able to report, "but he doesn't sound happy."

"Fine," Paul replied with a smile, though whether he was referring to Greaves's coming or to his not sounding happy I couldn't tell.

We sat waiting until Paul turned abruptly to Barnard, and I think I caught a glint of triumph in his eye. "In the meantime, Tris, I suppose you haven't forgotten there's a bet on, and you're the judge?"

Barnard grinned slyly as I gave him a pleading look. "You know, Paul," he replied with mock seriousness, "until all the evidence is in I can't really render a verdict. And considering the time it may take to bring Yates to trial, Harry might not have to read that book of yours for a year or more."

I felt like a man who had been granted a last-minute reprieve. "If Yates gets himself a good attorney," I laughed, "maybe I'll—"

A glance at Paul's grim face convinced me it would be better to keep quiet; after all, time was on my side, and he might just forget the whole thing.

Well, I suppose it's only fair to tell. He didn't.

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Most readers and critics identify O. Henry by his so-called literary trademark—the snapper, the twist of the tale, the surprise ending. And that identification will probably never change—it is too deep-rooted, too universally accepted. But O. Henry's stories are not always "tricky"; nor are they always lighthearted and frothy. O. Henry wrote "serious" stories too, and "A Municipal Report" is a serious story—deadly serious, and yet with no sacrifice of O. Henry's inimitable irony.

"A Municipal Report" has been called O. Henry's finest story. It would be hard to dispute or refute that appraisal . . .

A MUNICIPAL REPORT

by O. HENRY

The cities are full of pride,
Challenging each to each—
This from her mountainside,
That from her burthened beach.
R. KIPLING

Fancy a novel about Chicago or Buffalo, let us say, or Nashville, Tennessee! There are just three big cities in the United States that are "story cities"—New York, of course, New Orleans, and, best of the lot, San Francisco.—FRANK NORRIS.

EAST is East, and West is San Francisco, according to Californians. Californians are a race of people; they are not merely inhabitants of a State. They are the Southerners of the West. Now, Chicagoans are no less loyal to their city; but when you ask them why, they stammer and speak of lake fish and the new Odd Fellows Building. But Californians go into detail.

Of course they have, in the climate, an argument that is good for half an hour while you are thinking of your coal bills and heavy underwear. But as soon as they come to mistake your si-

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lence for conviction, madness comes upon them, and they picture the city of the Golden Gate as the Bagdad of the New World. So far, as a matter of opinion, no refutation is necessary. But dear cousins all (from Adam and Eve descended), it is a rash one who will lay his finger on the map and say: "In this town there can be no romance—what could happen here?" Yes, it is a bold and a rash deed to challenge in one sentence, history, romance, and Rand and McNally.

NASHVILLE.—A city, port of delivery, and the capital of the State of Tennessee, is on the Cumberland River and on the N.C. & St. L. and the L. & N. railroads. This city is regarded as the most important educational center in the South.

I stepped off the train at 8:00 P.M. Having searched the thesaurus in vain for adjectives, I must, as a substitution, hie me to comparison in the form of a recipe.

Take of London fog 30 parts; malaria 10 parts; gas leaks 20 parts; dewdrops gathered in a brickyard at sunrise 25 parts; odor of honeysuckle 15 parts. Mix.

The mixture will give you an approximate conception of a Nashville drizzle. It is not so fragrant as a mothball nor as thick as pea soup; but 'tis enough—'twill serve.

I went to a hotel in a tumbril. It required strong self-suppression for me to keep from climbing to the top of it and giving an imitation of Sidney Carton. The vehicle was drawn by beasts of a bygone era and driven by something dark and emancipated.

I was sleepy and tired, so when I got to the hotel I hurriedly paid it the fifty cents it demanded (with approximate lagniappe, I assure you). I knew its habits; and I did not want to hear it prate about its old "marster" or anything that happened "befo' de wah."

The hotel was one of the kind described as "renovated." That means $20,000 worth of new marble pillars, tiling, electric lights, and brass cuspidors in the lobby, and a new L. & N. timetable and a lithograph of Lookout Mountain in each one of the great rooms above. The management was without reproach, the attention full of exquisite Southern courtesy, the service as slow as the progress of a snail and as good-humored as Rip Van Winkle. The food was worth traveling a thousand miles for. There is no other hotel where you can get such chicken livers *en brochette*.

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At dinner I asked a Negro waiter if there was anything doing in town. He pondered gravely for a minute, and then replied, "Well, boss, I don't really reckon there's anything at all doin' after sundown."

Sundown had been accomplished; it had been drowned in the drizzle long before. So that spectacle was denied me. But I went forth upon the streets in the drizzle to see what might be there.

It is built on undulating grounds; and the streets are lighted by electricity at a cost of $32,470 per annum.

As I left the hotel there was a riot. Down upon me charged a company of freedmen, or Arabs, or Zulus, armed with—no, I saw with relief that they were not rifles, but whips. And I saw dimly a caravan of black, clumsy vehicles; and at the reassuring shouts, "Kyar you anywhere in the town, boss, fuh fifty cents," I reasoned that I was merely a "fare" instead of a victim.

I walked through long streets, all leading uphill. I wondered how those streets ever came down again. Perhaps they didn't until they were "graded." On a few of the "main streets" I saw lights in stores here and there; saw street cars go by conveying worthy burghers hither and yon; saw people pass engaged in the art of conversation; and heard a burst of semi-lively laughter issuing from a soda-water and ice-cream parlor. The streets other than "main" seemed to have enticed upon their borders houses consecrated to peace and domesticity. In many of them lights shone behind discreetly drawn window shades, in a few pianos tinkled orderly and irreproachable music. There was, indeed, little "doing." I wished I had come before sundown. So I returned to my hotel.

In November, 1864, the Confederate General Hood advanced against Nashville, where he shut up a National force under General Thomas. The latter then sallied forth and defeated the Confederates in a terrible conflict.

All my life I have heard of, admired, and witnessed the fine marksmanship of the South in its peaceful conflicts in the tobacco-chewing regions. But in my hotel a surprise awaited me. There were twelve bright, new, imposing, capacious brass cuspidors in the great lobby, tall enough to be called urns and so

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wide-mouthed that the crack pitcher of a ladies' baseball team should have been able to throw a ball into one of them at five paces distant. But, although a terrible battle had raged and was still raging, the enemy had not suffered. Bright, new, imposing, capacious, untouched, they stood. But, shades of Jefferson Brick! the tile floor—the beautiful tile floor! I could not avoid thinking of the battle of Nashville, and trying to draw, as is my foolish habit, some deductions about hereditary marksmanship.

Here I first saw Major (by misplaced courtesy) Wentworth Caswell. I knew him for a type the moment my eyes suffered from the sight of him. A rat has no geographical habitat. My old friend, A. Tennyson, said, as he so well said almost everything:

Prophet, curse me the blabbing lip,
And curse me the British vermin, the rat.

Let us regard the word "British" as interchangeable *ad lib*. A rat is a rat.

This man was hunting about the hotel lobby like a starved dog that had forgotten where he had buried a bone. He had a face of great acreage, red, pulpy, and with a kind of sleepy massiveness like that of Buddha. He possessed one single virtue—he was very smoothly shaven. The mark of the beast is not indelible upon a man until he goes about with a stubble. I think that if he had not used his razor that day I would have repulsed his advances, and the criminal calendar of the world would have been spared the addition of one murder.

I happened to be standing within five feet of a cuspidor when Major Caswell opened fire upon it. I had been observant enough to perceive that the attacking force was using Gatlings instead of squirrel rifles, so I sidestepped so promptly that the major seized the opportunity to apologize to a noncombatant. He had the blabbing lip. In four minutes he had become my friend and had dragged me to the bar.

I desire to interpolate here that I am a Southerner. But I am not one by profession or trade. I eschew the string tie, the slouch hat, the Prince Albert, the number of bales of cotton destroyed by Sherman, and plug chewing. When the orchestra plays *Dixie* I do not cheer. I slide a little lower on the leather-cornered seat and, well, order another Würzburger and wish that Longstreet had—but what's the use?

Major Caswell banged the bar with his fist, and the first gun at Fort Sumter re-echoed. When he fired the last one at Appomattox

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I began to hope. But then he began on family trees, and demonstrated that Adam was only a third cousin of a collateral branch of the Caswell family. Genealogy disposed of, he took up, to my distaste, his private family matters. He spoke of his wife, traced her descent back to Eve, and profanely denied any possible rumor that she may have had relations in the land of Nod.

By this time I began to suspect that he was trying to obscure by noise the fact that he had ordered the drinks, on the chance that I would be bewildered into paying for them. But when they were down he crashed a silver dollar loudly upon the bar. Then, of course, another serving was obligatory. And when I had paid for that I took leave of him brusquely; for I wanted no more of him. But before I had obtained my release he had prated loudly of an income that his wife received, and showed a handful of silver money.

When I got my key at the desk the clerk said to me courteously, "If that man Caswell has annoyed you, and if you would like to make a complaint, we will have him ejected. He is a nuisance, a loafer, and without any known means of support, although he seems to have some money most of the time. But we don't seem to be able to hit upon any means of throwing him out legally."

"Why, no," said I, after some reflection; "I don't see my way clear to making a complaint. But I would like to place myself on record as asserting that I do not care for his company. Your town," I continued, "seems to be a quiet one. What manner of entertainment, adventure, or excitement, have you to offer to the stranger within your gates?"

"Well, sir," said the clerk, "there will be a show here next Thursday. It is—I'll look it up and have the announcement sent up to your room with the ice water. Good night."

After I went up to my room I looked out the window. It was only about ten o'clock, but I looked upon a silent town. The drizzle continued, spangled with dim lights, as far apart as currants in a cake sold at the Ladies Exchange.

"A quiet place," I said to myself, as my first shoe struck the ceiling of the occupant of the room beneath mine. "Nothing of the life here that gives color and good variety to the cities in the East and West. Just a good, ordinary, humdrum business town."

Nashville occupies a foremost place among the manufacturing centers of the country. It is the fifth boot-and-shoe market in the

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United States, the largest candy-and-cracker manufacturing city in the South, and does an enormous wholesale dry-goods, grocery, and drug business.

I must tell you how I came to be in Nashville, and I assure you the digression brings as much tedium to me as it does to you. I was traveling elsewhere on my own business, but I had a commission from a Northern literary magazine to stop over there and establish a personal connection between the publication and one of its contributors, Azalea Adair.

Adair (there was no clue to the personality except the handwriting) had sent in some essays (lost art!) and poems that had made the editors swear approvingly over their one o'clock luncheon. So they had commissioned me to round up said Adair and corner by contract his or her output at two cents a word before some other publisher offered her ten or twenty.

At nine o'clock the next morning, after my chicken livers *en brochette* (try them if you can find that hotel), I strayed out into the drizzle, which was still on for an unlimited run. At the first corner I came upon Uncle Caesar. He was a stalwart Negro, older than the pyramids, with gray wool and a face that reminded me of Brutus, and a second afterwards of the late King Cettiwayo. He wore the most remarkable coat that I ever had seen or expect to see. It reached to his ankles and had once been a Confederate gray in color. But rain and sun and age had so variegated it that Joseph's coat, beside it, would have faded to pale monochrome. I must linger with that coat, for it has to do with the story—the story that is so long in coming, because you can hardly expect anything to happen in Nashville.

Once it must have been the military coat of an officer. The cape of it had vanished, but all down its front it had been frogged and tasseled magnificently. But now the frogs and tassels were gone. In their stead had been patiently stitched (I surmised by some surviving "black mammy") new frogs made of cunningly twisted common hempen twine. This twine was frayed and disheveled. It must have been added to the coat as a substitute for vanished splendors, with tasteless but painstaking devotion, for it followed faithfully the curves of the long-missing frogs. And, to complete the comedy and pathos of the garment, all its buttons were gone save one. The second button from the top alone remained. The coat was fastened by other twine strings tied through the but-

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tonholes and other holes rudely pierced in the opposite side. There was never such a weird garment so fantastically bedecked and of so many mottled hues. The lone button was the size of a half dollar, made of yellow horn and sewed on with coarse twine.

This Negro stood by a carriage so old that Ham himself might have started a hack line with it after he left the Ark with the two animals hitched to it. As I approached he threw open the door, drew out a feather duster, waved it without using it, and said in deep, rumbling tones:

"Step right in, suh; ain't a speck of dust in it—jus' got back from a funeral, suh."

I inferred that on such gala occasions carriages were given an extra cleaning. I looked up and down the street and perceived that there was little choice among the vehicles for hire that lined the curb. I looked in my memorandum book for the address of Azalea Adair.

"I want to go to 861 Jessamine Street," I said, and was about to step into the hack. But for an instant the thick, long, gorilla-like arm of the Negro barred me. On his massive and saturnine face a look of sudden suspicion and enmity flashed for a moment. Then, with quickly returning conviction, he asked, blandishingly, "What are you gwine there for, boss?"

"What is that to you?" I asked, a little sharply.

"Nothin', suh, jus' nothin'. Only it's a lonesome kind of part of town and few folks ever has business out there. Step right in. The seats is clean—jes' got back from a funeral, suh."

A mile and a half it must have been to our journey's end. I could hear nothing but the fearful rattle of the ancient hack over the uneven brick paving; I could smell nothing but the drizzle, now further flavored with coal smoke and something like a mixture of tar and oleander blossoms. All I could see through the streaming windows were two rows of dim houses.

The city has an area of 10 square miles; 181 miles of streets, of which 137 miles are paved; a system of waterworks that cost $2,000,000, with 77 miles of mains.

Eight-sixty-one Jessamine Street was a decayed mansion. Thirty yards back from the street it stood, outmerged in a splendid grove of trees and untrimmed shrubbery. A row of box bushes overflowed and almost hid the paling fence from sight; the gate

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was kept closed by a rope noose that encircled the gate post and the first paling of the gate. But when you got inside you saw that 861 was a shell, a shadow, a ghost of former grandeur and excellence. But in the story I have not yet got inside.

When the hack had ceased from rattling and the weary quadrupeds came to a rest I handed my jehu his fifty cents with an additional quarter, feeling a glow of conscious generosity as I did so. He refused it.

"It's two dollars, suh," he said.

"How's that?" I asked. "I plainly heard you call out at the hotel, 'Fifty cents to any part of the town.'"

"It's two dollars, suh," he repeated obstinately. "It's a long ways from the hotel."

"It is within the city limits and well within them," I argued. "Don't think that you have picked up a greenhorn Yankee. Do you see those hills over there?" I went on, pointing toward the east (I could not see them, myself, for the drizzle); "well, I was born and raised on their other side. You old fool, can't you tell people from other people when you see 'em?"

The grim face of King Cettiwayo softened. "Is you from the South, suh? I reckon it was them shoes of yourn fooled me. They is somethin' sharp in the toes for a Southern gen'l'man to wear."

"Then the charge is fifty cents, I suppose?" said I, inexorably.

His former expression, a mingling of cupidity and hostility, returned, remained ten seconds, and vanished.

"Boss," he said, "fifty cents is right; but I *needs* two dollars, suh; I'm *obleeged* to have two dollars. I ain't *demandin'* it now, suh; after I knows whar you's from; I'm jus' sayin' that I *has* to have two dollars tonight and business is mighty po'."

Peace and confidence settled upon his heavy features. He had been luckier than he had hoped. Instead of having picked up a greenhorn, ignorant of rates, he had come upon an inheritance.

"You confounded old rascal," I said, reaching down to my pocket, "you ought to be turned over to the police."

For the first time I saw him smile. He knew; *he knew*; HE KNEW.

I gave him two one-dollar bills. As I handed them over I noticed that one of them had seen parlous times. Its upper right-hand corner was missing, and it had been torn through in the middle, but joined again. A strip of blue tissue paper, pasted over the split, preserved its negotiability.

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Enough of the African bandit for the present: I left him happy, lifted the rope, and opened the creaky gate.

The house, as I said, was a shell. A paint brush had not touched it in twenty years. I could not see why a strong wind should not have bowled it over like a house of cards until I looked again at the trees that hugged it close—the trees that saw the battle of Nashville and still drew their protecting branches around it against storm and enemy and cold.

Azalea Adair, fifty years old, white-haired, a descendant of the cavaliers, as thin and frail as the house she lived in, robed in the cheapest and cleanest dress I ever saw, with an air as simple as a queen's, received me.

The reception room seemed a mile square, because there was nothing in it except some rows of books, on unpainted white-pine bookshelves, a cracked marble-topped table, a rag rug, a hairless horsehair sofa, and two or three chairs. Yes, there was a picture on the wall, a colored crayon drawing of a cluster of pansies. I looked around for the portrait of Andrew Jackson and the pine-cone hanging basket but they were not there.

Azalea Adair and I had conversation, a little of which will be repeated to you. She was a product of the old South, gently nurtured in the sheltered life. Her learning was not broad, but was deep and of splendid originality in its somewhat narrow scope. She had been educated at home, and her knowledge of the world was derived from inference and by inspiration. Of such is the precious, small group of essayists made. While she talked to me I kept brushing my fingers, trying, unconsciously, to rid them guiltily of the absent dust from the half-calf backs of Lamb, Chaucer, Hazlitt, Marcus Aurelius, Montaigne, and Hood. She was exquisite, she was a valuable discovery. Nearly everybody nowadays knows too much—oh, so much too much—of real life.

I could perceive clearly that Azalea Adair was very poor. A house and a dress she had, not much else, I fancied. So, divided between my duty to the magazine and my loyalty to the poets and essayists who fought Thomas in the valley of the Cumberland, I listened to her voice which was like a harpsichord's, and found that I could not speak of contracts. In the presence of the nine Muses and the three Graces one hesitated to lower the topic to two cents. There would have to be another colloquy after I had regained my commercialism. But I spoke of my mission, and three o'clock of the next afternoon was set for the discussion of the

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business proposition.

"Your town," I said, as I began to make ready to depart (which is the time for smooth generalities), "seems to be a quiet, sedate place. A home town, I should say, where few things out of the ordinary ever happen."

It carries on an extensive trade in stoves and hollow ware with the West and South, and its flouring mills have a daily capacity of more than 2,000 barrels.

Azalea Adair seemed to reflect.

"I have never thought of it that way," she said, with a kind of sincere intensity that seemed to belong to her. "Isn't it in the still, quiet places that things do happen? I fancy that when God began to create the earth on the first Monday morning one could have leaned out one's window and heard the drops of mud splashing from His trowel as He built up the everlasting hills. What did the noisiest project in the world—I mean the building of the tower of Babel—result in finally? A page and a half of Esperanto in the *North American Review*."

"Of course," said I, platitudinously, "human nature is the same everywhere; but there is more color—er—more drama and movement and—er—romance in some cities than in others."

"On the surface," said Azalea Adair. "I have traveled many times around the world in a golden airship wafted on two wings—print and dreams. I have seen, on one of my imaginary tours, the Sultan of Turkey bowstring with his own hands one of his wives who had uncovered her face in public. I have seen a man in Nashville tear up his theater tickets because his wife was going out with her face covered—with rice powder. In San Francisco's Chinatown I saw the slave girl Sing Yee dipped slowly, inch by inch, in boiling almond oil to make her swear she would never see her American lover again. She gave in when the boiling oil had reached three inches above her knee. At a euchre party in East Nashville the other night I saw Kitty Morgan cut dead by seven of her schoolmates and lifelong friends because she had married a house painter. The boiling oil was sizzling as high as her heart; but I wish you could have seen the fine little smile that she carried from table to table. Oh, yes, it is a humdrum town. Just a few miles of red brick houses and mud and stores and lumberyards."

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Someone had knocked hollowly at the back of the house. Azalea Adair breathed a soft apology and went to investigate the sound. She came back in three minutes with brightened eyes, a faint flush on her cheeks, and ten years lifted from her shoulders.

"You must have a cup of tea before you go," she said, "and a sugar cake."

She reached and shook a little iron bell. In shuffled a small Negro girl about twelve, barefoot, not very tidy, glowering at me with thumb in mouth and bulging eyes.

Azalea Adair opened a tiny, worn purse and drew out a dollar bill, a dollar bill with the upper right-hand corner missing, torn in two pieces and pasted together again with a strip of blue tissue paper. It was one of those bills I had given the piratical Negro—there was no doubt of it.

"Go up to Mr. Baker's store on the corner, Impy," she said, handing the girl the dollar bill, "and get a quarter of a pound of tea—the kind he always sends me—and ten cents' worth of sugar cakes. Now, hurry. The supply of tea in the house happens to be exhausted," she explained to me.

Impy left by the back way. Before the scrape of her hard, bare feet had died away on the back porch, a wild shriek—I was sure it was hers—filled the hollow house. Then the deep, gruff tones of an angry man's voice mingled with the girl's further squeals and unintelligible words.

Azalea Adair rose without surprise or emotion and disappeared. For two minutes I heard the hoarse rumble of the man's voice; then something like an oath and a slight scuffle, and she returned calmly to her chair.

"This is a roomy house," she said, "and I have a tenant for part of it. I am sorry to have to rescind my invitation to tea. It is impossible to get the kind I always use at the store. Perhaps tomorrow Mr. Baker will be able to supply me."

I was sure that Impy had not had time to leave the house. I inquired concerning street-car lines and took my leave. After I was well on my way I remembered that I had not learned Azalea Adair's name. But tomorrow would do.

That same day I started in on the course of iniquity that this uneventful city forced upon me. I was in the town only two days, but in that time I managed to lie shamelessly by telegraph, and to be an accomplice—after the fact, if that is the correct legal term—to a murder.

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As I rounded the corner nearest my hotel the Afrite coachman of the polychromatic, nonpareil coat seized me, swung open the dungeony door of his peripatetic sarcophagus, flirted his feather duster and began his ritual: "Step right in, boss. Carriage is clean—jus' got back from a funeral. Fifty cents to any—"

And then he knew me and grinned broadly. " 'Scuse me, boss; you is de gen'l'man what rid out with me dis mawnin'. Thank you kindly, suh."

"I am going out to 861 again tomorrow afternoon at three," said I, "and if you will be here, I'll let you drive me. So you know Miss Adair?" I concluded, thinking of my dollar bill.

"I belonged to her father, Judge Adair, suh," he replied.

"I judge that she is pretty poor," I said. "She hasn't much money to speak of, has she?"

For an instant I looked again at the fierce countenance of King Cettiwayo, and then he changed back to an extortionate old hack driver.

"She ain't gwine to starve, suh," he said slowly. "She has reso'ces, suh; she has reso'ces."

"I shall pay you fifty cents for the trip," said I.

"Dat is puffeckly correct, suh," he answered humbly. "I jus' *had* to have dat two dollars dis mawnin', boss."

I went to the hotel and lied by electricity. I wired the magazine: "A. Adair holds out for eight cents a word."

The answer that came back was: "Give it to her quick, you duffer."

Just before dinner "Major" Wentworth Caswell bore down upon me with the greetings of a long-lost friend. I have seen few men whom I have so instantaneously hated, and of whom it was so difficult to be rid. I was standing at the bar when he invaded me; therefore I could not wave the white ribbon in his face. I would have paid gladly for the drinks, hoping thereby to escape another; but he was one of those despicable, roaring, advertising bibbers who must have brass bands and fireworks attend upon every cent that they waste in their follies.

With an air of producing millions he drew two one-dollar bills from a pocket and dashed one of them upon the bar. I looked once more at the dollar bill with the upper right-hand corner missing, torn through the middle, and patched with a strip of blue tissue paper. It was my dollar again. It could have been no other.

I went up to my room. The drizzle and the monotony of a

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dreary, eventless Southern town had made me tired and listless. I remember that just before I went to bed I mentally disposed of the mysterious dollar bill (which might have formed the clue to a tremendously fine detective story of San Francisco) by saying to myself sleepily: "Seems as if a lot of people here own stock in the Hack-Drivers' Trust. Pays dividends promptly, too. Wonder if—" Then I fell asleep.

King Cettiwayo was at his post the next day and rattled my bones over the stones out to 861. He was to wait and rattle me back again when I was ready.

Azalea Adair looked paler and cleaner and frailer than she had looked on the day before. After she had signed the contract at eight cents per word she grew still paler and began to slip out of her chair. Without much trouble I managed to get her up on the antediluvian horsehair sofa and then I ran out to the sidewalk and yelled to the coffee-colored Pirate to bring a doctor. With a wisdom that I had not suspected in him he abandoned his team and struck off up the street afoot, realizing the value of speed. In ten minutes he returned with a grave, gray-haired, and capable man of medicine. In a few words (worth much less than eight cents each) I explained to him my presence in the hollow house of mystery. He bowed with stately understanding and turned to the old Negro.

"Uncle Caesar," he said calmly, "run up to my house and ask Miss Lucy to give you a cream pitcher full of fresh milk and half a tumbler of port wine. And hurry back. Don't drive—run. I want you to get back sometime this week."

It occurred to me that Dr. Merriman also felt a distrust as to the speeding powers of the land-pirate's steeds. After Uncle Caesar was gone, lumberingly, but swiftly, up the street, the doctor looked me over with great politeness and as much careful calculation until he had decided that I might do.

"It is only a case of insufficient nutrition," he said. "In other words, the result of poverty, pride, and starvation. Mrs. Caswell has many devoted friends who would be glad to aid her, but she will accept nothing except from that old Negro, Uncle Caesar, who was once owned by her family."

"Mrs. Caswell!" said I, in surprise. And then I looked at the contract and saw that she had signed it "Azalea Adair Caswell."

"I thought she was Miss Adair," I said.

"Married to a drunken, worthless loafer, sir," said the doctor.

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"It is said that he robs her even of the small sums that her old servant contributes toward her support."

When the milk and wine had been brought the doctor soon revived Azalea Adair. She sat up and talked of the beauty of the autumn leaves that were then in season and their height of color. She referred lightly to her fainting seizure as the outcome of an old palpitation of the heart. Impy fanned her as she lay on the sofa. The doctor was due elsewhere, and I followed him to the door. I told him that it was within my power and intentions to make a reasonable advance of money to Azalea Adair on future contributions to the magazine, and he seemed pleased.

"By the way," he said, "perhaps you would like to know that you have had royalty for a coachman. Old Caesar's grandfather was a king in Congo. Caesar himself has royal ways, as you may have observed."

As the doctor was moving off I heard Uncle Caesar's voice inside: "Did he git bofe of dem two dollars from you, Mis' Zalea?"

"Yes, Caesar," I heard Azalea Adair answer, weakly. And then I went in and concluded business negotiations with our contributor. I assumed the responsibility of advancing fifty dollars, putting it as a necessary formality in binding our bargain. And then Uncle Caesar drove me back to the hotel.

Here ends all of the story as far as I can testify as a witness. The rest must be only bare statements of facts.

At about six o'clock I went out for a stroll. Uncle Caesar was at his corner. He threw open the door of his carriage, flourished his duster, and began his depressing formula: "Step right in, suh. Fifty cents to anywhere in the city—hack's puffickly clean, suh—jus' got back from a funeral—"

And then he recognized me. I think his eyesight was getting bad. His coat had taken on a few more faded shades of color, the twine strings were more frayed and ragged, the last remaining button—the button of yellow horn—was gone. A motley descendant of kings was Uncle Caesar!

About two hours later I saw an excited crowd besieging the front of the drug store. In a desert where nothing happens this was manna; so I wedged my way inside. On an extemporized couch of empty boxes and chairs was stretched the mortal corporeality of Major Wentworth Caswell. A doctor was testing him for the mortal ingredient. His decision was that it was conspicuous by its absence.

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The erstwhile Major had been found dead on a dark street and brought by curious and ennuied citizens to the drug store. The late human being had engaged in terrific battle—the details showed that. Loafer and reprobate though he had been, he had been also a warrior. But he had lost. His hands were yet clinched so tightly that his fingers would not be opened. The gentle citizens who had known him stood about and searched their vocabularies to find some good words, if it were possible, to speak of him. One kind-looking man said, after much thought: "When 'Cas' was about fo'teen he was one of the best spellers in the school."

While I stood there the fingers of the right hand of "the man that was," which hung down the side of the white pine box, relaxed, and dropped something at my feet. I covered it with one foot quietly, and a little later on I picked it up and pocketed it. I reasoned that in his last struggle his hand must have seized that object unwittingly and held it in a death grip.

At the hotel that night the main topic of conversation, with the possible exceptions of politics and prohibition, was the demise of Major Caswell. I heard one man say to a group of listeners:

"In my opinion, gentlemen; Caswell was murdered for his money. He had fifty dollars this afternoon which he showed to several gentlemen in the hotel. When he was found the money was not on his person."

I left the city the next morning at nine, and as the train was crossing the bridge over the Cumberland River I took out of my pocket a yellow horn overcoat button the size of a fifty-cent piece, with frayed ends of coarse twine hanging from it, and cast it out of the window into the slow, muddy waters below.

I wonder what's doing in Buffalo!

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 496th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . In her letter accompanying the manuscript, the author wrote: "Ellery Queen's Mr. Drury Lane would spot the clue too early, but then Mr. Lane had very special qualifications." Obviously, the author meant this statement to be a clue, so we think it only fair to pass it on to you . . .

At the time Virginia Harvey submitted her first story, she was 63, a Professor of English at Cape Cod Community College, and in her 42nd year of teaching. Her leisure-time activities include reading, traveling, sewing, gardening, and "serving as a volunteer tutor for young people in the Barnstable House of Correction." We hail this newcomer to our ever-growing family of young-in-heart contributors . . .

THE CLUE ON THE FLYLEAF

by VIRGINIA HARVEY

Running my fingers over the polished surface of the desk that Aletta had given me last Christmas, I remembered how she had brushed aside my protests, saying, "Don't be silly. It's little enough to repay you."

Repay me! The shoe belonged on the other foot! There was no way that I could ever repay her.

We had met when I had, quite literally, bumped into her in the stacks of the local library where she was bent over searching the bottom shelf as I came around the corner tracking the alphabet on the top. The resulting collision had shaken me but not Aletta, who merely adjusted her glasses and reached out a hand to be helped to her feet.

As I hurried to retrieve her scattered books, I noticed that all three were novels by Dorothy L. Sayers. I asked her if she had read Janet Hitchman's biography of Sayers, *Such a Strange Lady*.

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Her reply, "It's not yet in large print," had embarrassed me more than her. A short woman, with white hair pulled straight up and wound in a tight bun on top of her head, any casting director would have chosen her for the role of Mrs. Santa Claus.

Whether it was because we both enjoyed Lord Peter Wimsey or because we both used the library frequently, I got to know Aletta Southworth, and that friendship had, for the past three years, provided me with both stimulation and challenge. As her sight continued to fail I began to read to her—newspapers, magazines, novels—her interests were catholic. Scarcely a paragraph failed to provoke a comment from her and we would be off, arguing, quoting any authority we knew, straightening out each other's logic much of the time, but more often talking back to the author. Never were two readers more critical of a writer's weakness or more admiring of a writer's strength.

And now she was dead. And I had found her body. I had gone over to read to her and when she failed to answer my knock, I had walked around the ranch-style house to look in the bedroom window. She was lying on her back in bed, propped up by pillows, a book beside her. I tapped on the window and called to her, but when she didn't move, I went to a neighbor's to phone the police.

A cruiser responded within minutes but it was clear that we were all much too late. There was an hour's wait for the Medical Examiner and then a trip to the Police Station so that I could make a statement. Through all of it the police had been kind and efficient. Death at 85, in a house that was undisturbed, seemed a routine matter to them.

Twice at the station I had opened my mouth to raise a question, and twice I had closed it for fear of sounding foolish; but sitting here at home I realized that I had to risk being laughed at. The alternative was unthinkable. If I were right, Aletta had been murdered.

Abruptly I got up and made a pot of coffee. While I was waiting for it to perk, I called a colleague at the University. Jim Koerner is chairman of the Department of Human Service Technologies, which is to say, a cop turned academic. He snapped up my invitation as I had known he would. Jim likes my twelve-year-old Scotch.

A half hour later, settled in my best chair, he listened intently, waiting until I had finished to ask, "What bothers you?"

"Two things. For one, the book lying beside her. To begin with,

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Aletta could read only very large print, and it was Oliver Wendell Holmes's first novel, *The Guardian Angel*—a silly book that she wouldn't have wanted to read at all, and its print is too small. I'm sure the only reason she gave it shelf space was because it was a first edition in mint condition. As I put it back on the shelf after the police had finished, I saw that she had written something on the flyleaf—the word EDSON. It was Aletta's scrawl, all right, and she'd used her favorite soft lead pencil."

"And you think she was leaving a clue? Why not just a message? Maybe she realized she was having a heart attack or a stroke and wanted to leave a last word for somebody named Edson?"

"I suppose that could be it, but it doesn't seem very likely to me. Don't you suppose when you're past eighty you've already put any message you want to leave in a safe easy-to-find place?"

"Probably. You said there were two things. What's the second?"

I hesitated. Jim didn't seem to think the name written in the book was important. Maybe I was letting my imagination run away with me, but I like to finish what I start, so I went on. "The coffee cup in the sink."

"I'm sure that if I were Sherlock Holmes I could analyze that, but when I think of how many times I leave dishes in my sink—" Jim's smile took the sting out of his teasing.

"The academic world is dulling your mind. She was practically blind. She always washed, dried, and put away a cup, glass, or dish. Otherwise, if she forgot it was there, she might easily put something down on top of it and break both."

"Touché." Jim was grinning at my smugness. "Anything else bother you?"

"I wish I knew whether she died last night before she *un*dressed, or whether she died this morning after she dressed."

"The autopsy report will clear that up. What difference?"

I stopped to refill our glasses. "If she died last night there should have been a glass on the table beside her. Aletta had a nightcap every night of her life. She told me that her doctor said that it was better than any sleeping pill he could prescribe. He'd suggested vermouth on the rocks, but she hated that and substituted a stinger. I stayed with her last summer during that long power blackout and she gave me one." I chuckled at the memory. "I must say it worked!"

"And you didn't mention any of these things to the police?"

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"What could I say? That Aletta wouldn't deface a first edition in mint condition? That she wouldn't break her rule about putting away her coffee cup? That, for one night, she would skip her stinger? I was afraid they'd laugh at me!"

Jim put down his drink and began the ritual of filling his pipe. Idly I wondered if he'd smoked a pipe in the days before he'd earned his doctorate. But when he spoke, he was not the academician. "All right. Let's start again. Tell me exactly what you did from the time you left home until you got to the police station. And then tell me everything you know about this woman."

And for the next thirty minutes I did just that. Somewhere in the telling I got up and made omelets for us. By the time I'd wound down we were ready for coffee.

"Good. Now, let me ask some questions. You say she had no family except a stepson, and that they haven't been in touch for years?"

"That's right. Aletta was sixty when she married Richard Southworth. Apparently Rick, his son, resented his father remarrying so soon after his mother's death. Aletta said the only time she ever saw him was at Christmas dinner and that after his father died, she never saw him again. I don't think she even knew where he was."

"Someone must know. Her lawyer, maybe. Do you know who that was?"

"Once she asked me to drive her to Sam Ogden's office. She said she needed to revise some plans she had made. At the time I wondered if that was her way of saying that she wanted to change her will. I suppose if he drew her will he would know."

"Okay. That's a start. I can talk to him. Now, can you think of any time she ever said anything that would indicate that she was afraid of someone? Or that she had any enemies?"

"Absolutely no—to both questions."

"You're sure?"

"Aletta wasn't afraid of anything. I even had to argue with her about keeping her door locked. As for enemies, I can't imagine it. We never talked about our personal lives, so there wouldn't have been any reason to talk about enemies—oh, wait!" I'd had a flashback—one of those moments when a scene unrolls in the back of your head. "She once quoted Shakespeare."

Jim groaned. "Relevant as the bard may be, I doubt that he will help us, but let's have it."

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"I'll have to go back and start where we started. We had been talking about a protest march that we thought ill-advised, and that led us to talk about the failure of compulsory education to teach people to reason, and that led us to talk about the collective insanity of modern man, and that led Aletta to Henry the Eighth."

Jim looked a little dazed. "Henry the Eighth?"

"Of course. '—you have many enemies, that know not/Why they are so, but like to village-curs,/Bark when their fellows do—' "

"Apropos as it may have been to that conversation, it doesn't seem to help us much here. No other mention of enemies?"

"I can't think of any."

Jim glanced at his watch. "Where's your phone?"

"In the bedroom."

I had the dishes stacked by the time he had finished. I could tell by his face that he had learned something. "You were right," he muttered through his pipestem. "I called one of my former students who's on the force. He checked the autopsy report. Death was caused by respiratory failure as a result of too many barbiturates mixed with alcohol. They thought suicide at first, but no bottle was found, nor did she leave a note."

"She left the word EDSON."

"But they didn't know that until I told them just now. The Chief wants us to come down so that you can add to your statement. I told him about Sam Ogden, too. He said he'll follow that up."

At the station we were escorted down a long corridor to the Chief's office. Inside, I looked around. The usual pictures of wife and children, a dictating machine, a snake plant that needed water—it might have been any business office except for the prominently displayed gold badge on its velvet-covered plastic stand.

Chief Fiori shook hands with Jim, and although we had never met, called me by name. We were just seating ourselves in the molded fiberglass chairs across from his desk when Sam Ogden was ushered in.

The amenities were disposed of quickly and Fiori went right to the point.

"We have your statement." He smiled at me. "But now that we know that Mrs. Southworth did not succumb to natural causes, it would greatly assist us if you, Mr. Ogden, would fill in some

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background for us, and later Miss Cooke here will add to her statement."

While he was talking, he had been busy setting up a tape recorder. He picked up the microphone and spoke into it. "It is four fifteen on the afternoon of March 1, 1978. I am Anthony Fiori, Chief of the Millbrook Police. In my office with me are: Mr. Samuel Ogden, attorney for Mrs. Aletta Southworth, Miss Katherine Cooke, friend of the aforementioned Mrs. Southworth, and Dr. James Koerner, a criminologist, and friend of Miss Cooke. All three have agreed—" He stopped the machine and looked at us. "You do agree that I may tape?" We nodded affirmatively, and he started the machine. "That I may tape our conversation. The said conversation to be directed at gathering all the information available about Mrs. Southworth in an attempt to discover if there was motive and/or opportunity for her death at the hands of a person or persons unknown."

I struggled with a giggle. Aletta would have loved it. I could almost hear her acid comment about pomposity. But Chief Fiori was no fool. He turned the microphone toward Sam Ogden. "Now, sir. What about her will? Who stands to benefit?"

Obviously, Sam Ogden was no stranger to the procedure. He turned toward the recorder and raised his voice. "This is Samuel J. Ogden, attorney-at-law and executor of the estate of Aletta Drew Southworth. I am speaking voluntarily, without subpoena, because I believe it to be in the best interest of my client to do so." He reached over and snapped off the recorder. "The only way this will make any sense is for me to go back a number of years."

Fiori smiled, "I have all the time in the world."

Ogden restarted the machine and continued. "I met Richard Southworth in 1944. He and his first wife Margaret were my first clients. They had just moved here and wanted new wills. Their son, Rick, was then twenty and already an alcoholic. He'd been in and out of trouble for five years and they wanted to be sure that if anything happened to them, Rick would have an income but not be able to touch the principal. I guess it would be more accurate to say that Margaret wanted him to have an income. Richard would have left him out entirely, so this was a compromise. Frankly, as a lawyer, I was grateful. Completely cutting off an only son practically guarantees a court challenge."

He stopped to relight his cigar and Fiori took the opportunity to ask one of the patrolmen to bring in coffee.

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"Sorry," he said to Ogden. "Go on."

I had to admire the lawyer's concentration. He picked up as if there had been no interruption. "So I was pleased that Southworth was willing to compromise. Anyway, I wrote the wills. I never saw them again until Margaret's will was probated."

"What were the terms of Margaret's will?" Fiori looked up from his doodling.

"Everything into a trust fund—income to Richard until he died, and then the trust to end, and the principal to Rick."

"How much was she worth?"

"About one hundred thousand. She had inherited some securities from her father which Richard managed for her. In 1949, when she died, they made a very nice portfolio."

"What happened when Richard Southworth died?"

"Richard died in the early sixties. I have the exact date if it becomes important. Everything went into a trust fund—income to Aletta for her lifetime, and after her death, income to Rick for his life."

"And then what?"

"Capital to be divided between the Millbrook Community Church and Princeton University."

"Size of the trust?"

"A little over a million in today's market."

"Enough to provide a strong motive for Rick and enough to rule out concern over money as a reason for her suicide."

Jim moved forward in his chair to ask, "Sam, did Aletta have a will?"

"Yes. I drew her will the day before she and Richard were married."

"Anything in it that would help us?" For the first time Jim had made it clear that we were aligned with Fiori in the investigation.

"There are two or three small bequests, then one of $150,000 to Rick, and the residual to the Community Church Building Fund. She was—"

"Wait a minute!" Fiori's head had snapped up. "I thought you said on the telephone"—he was looking directly at Jim—"that Aletta Southworth hardly knew this stepson of hers."

"I did." Jim turned to me. "That was your impression, wasn't it, Kit?"

Ogden broke in before I could answer. "That's true, Chief. But

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Mrs. Southworth was a woman of very strong principles. That $150,000 was money she had saved from the income of Richard's trust. She lived a simple life and didn't seem to need much. The other bequests she made were her own money—money she had before she married Richard. She said this was Southworth money and must therefore go to his son."

Fiori had been figuring on the margin of his paper. "So this Richard Southworth, Jr. will now inherit $150,000 plus about $50,000 annually from the trust—and that's on top of the $100,000 he got from his mother's estate?"

"That's right. Unless, of course, he was in some way responsible for his stepmother's death."

"Did Rick know that Aletta had added that to her will?"

"No way." Ogden was firm.

"Do you have an address for him?"

"No. Aletta Southworth said that he lived in Westchester County last she knew, but not to worry, when he saw the death notice in the paper he'd show up."

Fiori turned to me. "You seem to be the one who knew her best. Fill me in on those things you didn't include in your statement. Remember, no detail is too small."

And so, once again, I went over the word written on the flyleaf of a first edition, the coffee cup in the sink, and the lack of the nightcap glass. Fiori listened carefully until I finished. Then he snapped off the recorder, removed the reel, and asked each of us to initial its label. Suddenly we were being ushered out. Before we reached the end of the corridor, Fiori had caught up and pulled Jim off to one side.

Ogden and I separated in the parking lot and I had barely reached Jim's car when he appeared. Determined not to seem curious, I waited for him to speak.

"Fiori is worried. No question but that Rick is the Number One suspect, but if he brings him in, he can only hold him for twenty-four hours without charging him."

"He hasn't found him yet."

"He will. If he's innocent, he's not hiding. Fiori will feed the computer and by night they'll have him. Even if he's guilty, he's going to have to show up to collect."

"If he did it, I sure hope they can pin it on him." I surprised myself with the strength of my feeling.

"Much of that depends on you."

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"Me? I've told you everything I know."

"If you're right about the name she wrote in the book—that Aletta was deliberately leaving a clue—maybe there's something in it that Fiori can use in interrogating Rick."

"It's not much help unless we know what it means. I've tried and tried to figure it out, but I get nowhere."

"I know. But put a little more thought in it tonight, then sleep on it. Memory is a tricky thing. It often works through the unconscious. With luck, maybe while you're drinking your morning coffee, you'll suddenly realize what it means."

Jim sounded so confident that I half believed him. After I had added my dinner dishes to the lunch plates in the sink, I sat at my desk and played with the word EDSON. I tried anagrams: nosed, nodes, soned, dones; impatiently I threw my pencil across the desk and turned on the hi-fi . . .

Ordinarily an early riser, I was startled to see that it was after eight when the telephone awakened me. It was Jim.

"Can you be ready in half an hour? The Yonkers police recognized Rick's name. He spends so much time in their drunk tank that it might better be listed as his permanent address. Fiori's men are on their way back with him and he wants you to come down and look at him."

"Look at him? What for?" I was still half asleep.

"Maybe you've seen him around here. Fiori needs something to use as a handle in questioning him. Motive alone isn't enough."

I had to forego breakfast, so I was waiting in the driveway when Jim pulled in. We didn't talk much on the short drive; without my morning coffee I'm inarticulate.

Standing in the corridor, watching Fiori's long stride as he came to meet us, it hit me. "I've got it!"

"What have you got?" Fiori and Jim spoke as one.

"Can we go somewhere a little less public?"

Fiori led us into a room only a little larger than a closet. Jim had to squeeze himself behind me so that the door could be closed.

"Now, what have you got?"

"It's really very simple once you see it. Edson—Ed's son—son of Edward, the Black Prince."

Both men stared at me. Fiori spoke first. "And who was Edward's son?"

"Richard the Second."

"Richard the Second is Richard, Jr. Bingo!" Fiori was jubilant.

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Jim was frowning. "But why play word games? If she was dying, why risk it being missed? Why didn't she just write Rick?"

"He may have still been in the house. Right now it doesn't matter. This gives me what I need to ask some very pointed questions!" Fiori was out the door and halfway down the hall before he turned to shout his thanks.

Chief Fiori could not play Exton, but he was a skilled interrogator. Early that evening Rick confessed. Sam Ogden, who has the job of settling Aletta's estate, is going to give me the copy of *The Guardian Angel* with its telltale inscription. I'm giving Chief Fiori and Jim each a copy of Shakespeare's *Richard II*. I don't suppose either one of them will ever read it.

DETECTIVERSE

HE ALSO SERVES

by MARK GRENIER

Black Widowers may fray their nerves
With theories and debates,
But Henry proves he also serves
Who only stands and waits.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 497th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a chilling short-short. . .

The author, Judith K. Maffei, wrote her first story for a creative-writing course sponsored by the Boston branch of MWA (Mystery Writers of America). She was thirty-one at the time and working for Delta Airlines. On one of her furloughs she worked in a mental institution near Boston where, she recalls, some of the inmates "were probably the sanest people" she ever met. (Page Dr. Laing!) At Delta she now "spends many hours talking to about one hundred people a day . . . and there's a story behind every voice." Your Editor agrees wholeheartedly. . .

I CAN'T GET THEM RIGHT

by JUDITH K. MAFFEI

It's the eyes—they're all wrong. I can't seem to get them right. Fishy-looking. Now that I think about it, I never liked John's eyes anyway. Nasty. Maybe if I try mixing white on the brush I can brighten them up. A dab more color on the canvas and the eyes begin to pulse and taunt me. I have to look away.

Another headache. Not much sense in doing any more now, the pain's getting worse. It creeps up gradually and then attacks the inside of my skull like a thousand tiny men with axes chopping at my brain.

I stumble into the kitchen with my hands on my head and scan the room. My pills are on the counter. I take three. Yesterday I needed only two, but today it's worse. I head for the stairs and climb to the bedroom to lie down and wait for this to end.

With any luck John will never know I've had another headache, unless he counts the pills. I must remember to hide them later. There seems to be something about the pills—or is it John?—that I've forgotten. I can't quite remember. It's like a cobweb tickling

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my memory. It's no use dwelling on it now. Too much of an effort.

Anyway, just thinking about John irritates me so much that I want to scream, and I musn't scream. I mustn't ever scream. Then he'll know for sure, and the first thing he'll do is send me back. I can't let him do that. The thought of being imprisoned behind those chilling bare walls again, wearing paper slippers, sends me into a rage.

Rage, really! I must be careful. Any outburst like that would remind him of that last time and he'd send me back immediately.

I'd almost forgotton about that last time. I've been forgetting a lot of things lately. It must be the headaches. I was very upset then, but certainly with good reason.

It should have been perfectly clear to the doctor I saw later. But it wasn't. I had told him that all I wanted to do that day was leave the house and take a drive by myself. I had wanted to ride through town and do a little window shopping. Surely I was entitled to do that.

John was furious when he found me. I had just started the car and I didn't hear him coming. He yelled at me and pulled me out of the car, into the house and up the stairs. I tried to fight back, but he was too strong. Then he threw me into the bedroom and locked the door. I screamed, but he ignored me.

Finally, in frustration, I began destroying everything I could lay my hands on. I hurled lamps across the room and ripped his books to pieces. I smashed ashtrays and flung pillows and tried to demolish the whole room. He still wouldn't let me out. I tore all the pockets off his suits and that's when I found his precious camera equipment on the floor of the closet. I guess that's what did it.

Later the doctor told me that my psyche was split. I didn't like him much either. Nonetheless, I learned to be good and I cooperated and now I'm free—at least I will be when I get rid of John. I've thought of it before, of course, but it wasn't until now that I decided positively.

I heard him on the phone. He was trying to reach the doctor. Fortunately the doctor wasn't in. I listened carefully to the conversation and John didn't leave his name. He said he'd call again later.

Then I watched him leave the house and walk down to his cottage where he does his work. That's why we moved here in the first place—so that he could write all day in peace. Since then I've been surrounded by all these trees and isolated in this house.

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John keeps the keys to the car with him now, and there's nowhere for me to walk. However, there are plenty of places here to hide things.

The pills are working and my headache seems long ago. Soon it will be time. I get up slowly and walk downstairs past my painting. I notice the eyes again, staring at me. Funny how much trouble I'm having with them. Not that it matters now. Once he's gone I won't ever have to look at them again.

It's almost lunchtime and John will be waiting for me, only I'm not bringing him any lunch today. It will be easy really. John never turns around when I come into the cottage. He knows who it is, so he never bothers. He just motions for me to put his lunch down next to his typewriter and then I leave. Today will be different.

The path to the cottage is downhill and I pick up momentum as I walk past the trees. Yes, there it is. I can see it. It's leaning up against the white wall of his bungalow, just as I remembered. John uses it to chop away annoying branches that brush against the roof and disturb his concentration.

A fitting instrument, I think. A few more steps and I have it. The wooden handle feels smooth in my hand. A little heavy, but all the better. I reach for the door. My hand tingles, my heart begins to beat faster and wind seems to blow inside my head. It's trying to tell me something, but I don't want to listen. I steady myself and quietly turn the knob and open the door. Silence. For a moment I stop, paralyzed with fear. I don't hear the sound of the typewriter.

My head is pounding, my mouth is dry, but I will myself to go forward and I step into the cottage. Then I see him. My eyes are riveted to his.

Now I know where I've seen those eyes before. I remember now. I killed him some time ago. The memory surges through my brain and brings with it the horror of knowing that I'm going to forget it again, until tomorrow, lunchtime. I walk out of the cottage and replace the ax.

I hope someone finds me.

I'm so sick of this painting. I'll try using a little yellow this time, the white didn't work at all. It's the eyes—I just can't seem to get them right.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 498th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an unusual debut in print. . .

The author, Alan Legg, was thirty-four when he submitted his first story and living happily with his wife Susan and their three-year-old son Artie in Fort Collins, Colorado, where Mr. Legg teaches high-school English and Social Studies. He enjoys "reading, pinochle, bicycling, and softball, and his favorite writers include Robert Heinlein, Kurt Vonnegut, John Hersey, Hugh Pentecost, James Jones, and Frank Herbert." (Well, one of us made it!) . . .

NEWS BROADCAST, JANUARY 23, 2012

by ALAN LEGG

"Good evening, sisters and brothers and travelers in our scenic wonderland of fun. I am Brother Marvin Sunshine with the regional update of the news of this day, January 23, 2012. This report is a service of Mother Goose, Inc., 'the fast-food people who have earned your trust.'

"President Ramirez announced today the resignation of her husband, Carlos Ramirez, as First Gentleman of the United States. This resignation came unexpectedly as the Ramirez administration is only three days old. Mr. Ramirez will be replaced by their son, Cesar, who will be sworn in next Monday under the Johnson Memorial Rose Arbor. Cesar Ramirez is a 2009 graduate of Colorado State University's school of veterinary medicine; before his mother's campaign he was on the staff of the Denver Zoo. Carlos Ramirez will stay on as husband and plans to return to his real-estate business in Fort Collins, Colorado . . .

"Funeral services were held today in Denver and Phoenix for the eight Denver Mustangs and the eleven Phoenix Condors who

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were killed Sunday night in the Western League Playoffs at Interstates 29 and 80 near the Omaha Crater. While families, friends, and fans attended the memorial masses and services, Colorado's Senators introduced a bill to ban firearms, knives, clubs, and chemical explosives from professional football. A spokesperson for the NBFL Owners' Association said that the bill if passed would ruin half of the franchises in the two leagues by boring the viewing audience. He continued to say that blood-football is essential to the recreation and morale of millions of American men, women, and children . . .

"Harvey Wayne Champion died today in the hospital of the Colorado State Prison in Canon City of a lethal dose of an undisclosed prescription drug. Last week the United States Supreme Court, by a vote of eight to five, denied the right of the state of Colorado to execute Champion for his role in the 2010 kidnaping, gang-rape, and mutilation-killing of Vail socialite, Marianne Granville. Yesterday Champion, a retired Navy flier and veteran of the Second Korean War, was admitted to the hospital for severe stomach cramps. His doctor, Roger K. Littlefield, admitted to giving Champion the unknown drug and claimed that Harvey Wayne Champion had asked many times for something that would end his life. Dr. Littlefield is the Vail-area doctor who brought both Champion and the late Ms. Granville into the world . . .

"Van Harrison, the mysterious and controversial lead singer of the country-rock group, Ghost Riders, appeared in court today in Cheyenne, Wyoming, without the world-famous black mask and mule-skinner hat that he has worn in public since his emergence as a star in 1998. The occasion of his unveiling was his attempt to have his six-year-old daughter, Melissa, removed from the custody of his ex-wife, Angelina di Corrado Harrison Filestone, better-known as the novelist, Ann D. Corrie. Melissa will remain with her mother. Judge Sylvia Schonberg ruled that Mr. Harrison's aberrant behavior makes him an unsuitable father. His lawyer will file an appeal and a suit charging the judge with vocational prejudice against rock musicians. The suit is based on the Vocational Equality Act of 1991 . . .

"Janet Gallagher won the World Chess Championship today in Helsinki, Finland, by defeating Orestes Patrick Ziolkowski of Australia by a checkmate in the fourteenth minute of the eighth hour of the twelfth day of their best of twenty-three series. The final score was Ms. Gallagher 12, Mr. Ziolkowski 11. Ms. Gal-

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lagher has won the world title for the eleventh consecutive year. Again she donated the total purse of $750,000 to the Worldwide Organ and Tissue Bank. Ms. Gallagher was born blind in 1980 in Corpus Christi, Texas, but received her eyes from the organ bank in 1984. Since 1995 she has donated over $7,000,000 to the Worldwide Bank for the purchase of body parts for transplantation. 'I thank God for my eyes and my mind. As a child I wanted to know who had given me a world of freedom and beauty. But now I'm glad I never learned who the donor was, because anyone could be the daughter, son, sister, or brother of the one who helped me. So I can't hate anyone ever, and I'm glad.' With these words she presented the check for $750,000 to Mr. Karl S. Bardhelm, the Executive Secretary of the Worldwide Organ and Tissue Bank. . .

"More news after a message from Mother Goose. Thank you, Rocky Mountain America, for making Gooseburgers and Gandersteaks your favorite fast-food. Since 1991 we have tried to earn your confidence, to be the fast-food people you trust. And you do trust us; millions of Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Idaho, and New Mexico families go to Mother Goose Land every week. On March tenth, the twenty-first anniversary of the day Judge Marlan Ganders sold his first gooseburger to Mrs. Amy Platt in Rome, Georgia, Mother Goose, Inc. will introduce to the men, women, and children of America the most delicious new food in the history of humankind. March tenth will be the first day of a new age in culinary pleasure. In Mother Goose Land we are proud to serve people any way we can . . .

"And now back to the news. Ruth Ann Fairchild remains the only survivor of the famous, fateful Minerva-5 space mission to the moons of Jupiter. That mission occurred in 2007. When the seven men and seven women returned, all alive but noticeably frightened, a curtain of secrecy fell over the findings of that mission. No one broke the silence until last week when Congress began an investigation of the incident as part of a probe of NASA's relationship with various aircraft manufacturers. When three of the fourteen astronauts indicated intentions of testifying, a series of unexplained deaths began. Three died in auto wrecks; four were apparent suicides; three were in plane crashes; one fell out of a window; two were shot in their homes by burglars. Tonight Ruth Ann Fairchild, a colonel at Scott Air Force Base in Belleville, Illinois, is under guard aboard a special monorail ex-

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press to Washington. Tomorrow she will testify before Congress about the mysterious discoveries of the Minerva-5 mission . . .

"The official and only verified will of John Howard Blue was probated today. The bulk of the Blue fortune has been left to the American Bible Society, over $14,000,000,000. Another $4,000,000,000 will be divided among five charitable organizations: the Kidney Foundation, the Cancer Society, the United Fund, the Heart Fund, and the Worldwide Organ and Tissue Bank. Another $150,000,000 will operate the Blue Medical Center in Salt Lake City. The remainder of $10,000,000 has been willed to Thomas Jerry Parker, the man who was Mr. Blue's personal bodyguard for twenty-two years. During that time Mr. Parker was never more than ten yards away from his boss. Mr. Parker, a former Baptist missionary, could not be reached for comment. He is fifty-eight years old and has never been married. The will has been challenged in an Ogden, Utah, court by the children of John Howard Blue: John Raymond Blue, forty-two; Jackson Blue, thirty-eight; and Andrea Blue Mason, thirty-one. The will left $6 for them to divide as they see fit . . .

"The District Attorney of Denver, Colorado, today announced an indictment against Dale VanDyke, sole owner and manager of the national fast-food chain, Mother Goose, Inc., and Agnes Wheatley, Karl S. Bardhelm, Martin Corey, and Jennifer Ross, the officers of the Worldwide Organ and Tissue Bank. The indictment alleges that Ms. VanDyke offered Worldwide's officers an unspecified amount of money on a monthly basis for a regular supply of untransplantable human-body parts. On the advice of their attorneys, Worldwide's officers have made no response to reporters. Ms. VanDyke has denied all charges and all contact with Worldwide. When a reporter from the *Rocky Mountain News* asked if the indictment provided a hint about the secret new food product that Mother Goose, Inc. has been promoting in a national magazine-and-television campaign, Ms. VanDyke assaulted him with her attaché case, breaking his glasses . . .

"That concludes the news of January 23, 2012. Remember to watch the debate between Robert Alden, former Presidential advisor on pediatric affairs, and Burl Ray Finch, national chairperson of Spare the Rod. The topic is: That children should have the same civil rights as robots. The debate will be broadcast tonight on this channel at nine o'clock, Mountain Daylight Time. I am Brother Marvin Sunshine; have a wonderful night."

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

Isn't it occasionally satisfying to sit back and say, "I told you so!" as everyone else scrambles to leap on the bandwagon which you've been happily riding for years and years? That pleasant situation seems to be transpiring in the mystery field, which is acquiring new devotees and practitioners at an astonishing rate. While there has been a steady decline in the number of "pure" detective stories in the great classical tradition, we are witnessing a veritable eruption of suspense stories, occult opuses, terror tales, and espionage epics. Equally significant and joyous is the number of "mainstream" novels which contain vital elements of mystery fiction, and the laudable conversion of "mainstream" novelists who are writing—surprise!—mysteries.

Harlan Ellison, one of the most honored science-fiction writers in history, has written numerous stories which dip into the murky waters of crime and suspense (he won an Edgar a few years ago for his chilling tale, "The Whimper of Whipped Dogs," which was inspired by the brutal slaying of Kitty Genovese in full view of a large but mute audience). Now, Jove Books is paying him an extraordinary (and deserved) tribute by reprinting the bulk of his work, often updated with new introductions and additional material. Nearly half of the series of more than 20 volumes has memorable fiction to interest mystery aficionados. Ellison, whose predilection for the mystery has grown through the years, is planning a book which he suggests could be his masterpiece—and it is a mystery novel. *That* will be worth waiting for!

Shelby Foote, the distinguished author of a universally applauded three-volume history of the Civil War, has returned to the novel form (after a 20-year hiatus) with *September September* (Random House, $8.95). A splendid portrait of a time (1957), place (the South) and three small-time criminals (bungling kidnapers), the book may not appeal to all tastes (the President, Eisenhower, is called

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a "kewpie doll," and I am personally suspicious of a southern writer who uses the British spelling of "clew"), but no one who reads this moving narrative will quickly forget it.

Night-Side (Vanguard, $10) by Joyce Carol Oates is a strange collection of 18 stories. Although she is one of the most brilliant fashioners of short fiction, it is probably true that she writes too much, and one wonders what she could accomplish if she produced only half the output. Still, there is a kaleidoscopic range to her work, with this collection dwelling on the dark side of the spectrum. "The Murder," a bizarre intellectual fantasy, has an especially relentless grasp on the memory.

Even the moderns are doing it. Geoffrey Wolff, who wrote a fine tribute to Harry Crosby and the Black Sun Press, has produced a rather slick and very 1970's comic suspense novel called *Inklings* (Random House, $7.95). The hero is Jupe, the girl is Mouse, and the bad guy is Mole, and where are you, Dick Tracy?

And to prove that the tradition of non-mystery writers trying their hands at that form dates farther back than most of us can remember, Louisa May Alcott's *Behind a Mask* has been released in paperback (Bantam, $2.25) after a highly successful series of reprintings in its hardcover edition (William Morrow).

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

When the playbill pleads with you not to reveal the show's surprises to any future audiences, and that show has been written by Ira Levin, you know that you are at home at the theater. Levin's *Deathtrap,* which opened on Broadway last month, aimed to please no one but mystery addicts. An amiable crime-writer (played by John Wood, who triumphed a few years back as the Royal Shakespeare Company's Sherlock Holmes) and his wife invite a student into their Connecticut home in order to kill the young man and steal the mystery plot he has just written. This is only the first of several riveting onstage murders (one done with a crossbow!); the twists and surprises hammer the audience with bullet force. Events turn even murkier with the entrance of a strange woman psychic called in as a police consultant, but this is no occult thriller like *Rosemary's Baby;* it is pure mystery

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constructed by the master hand who stunned us first with *A Kiss Before Dying* (1953). Nothing which happens on stage—no relationship, especially—is quite what it seems, and the shocks are so whiplash they disconcerted a few of the more staid critics, some of whom actually *complained* that the play was too thick with surprise! *Deathtrap* springs some wonderful starts, and should make an intriguing movie (the rights are already actively being sought).

There is more mystery theater happening, as usual, *off* Broadway. *Final Twist,* a *Rope*-styled play of murder among students, was showcased recently, the work of mystery playwright Bob Barry, who a few seasons back gave Broadway *Murder Among Friends,* in which Janet Leigh conspired with her lover to kill her husband—or is it the other way around? *Friends* has found friends currently in long-running London and Berlin productions; London especially is rich with murder stagings, including three Agatha Christies playing, and may host the first production of Barry's *It's Murder in the Hamptons,* featuring a Nick-and-Nora-Charles style of hero and heroine in a bizarre comedy wherein a will is read at midnight. *Insufficient Evidence,* a new play by Eleazar Lipsky (famed for his *Kiss of/ Death),* showcased recently, based on an actual case in which an aging Assistant District Attorney becomes intrigued with a woman he has placed on trial for murder. The Sharon Playhouse in Connecticut premiered *The Lame Duck Party* by Judson Philips (Hugh Pentecost), a whodunit about murder during Christmas recess at a private school. And Agatha Christie has not been neglected. New York's Impossible Ragtime Theater has brought good ensemble playing to a series of Christie revivals which have left audiences cheering (literally). At the Planting Fields Arboretum, a State Park-maintained mansion at Oyster Bay, Long Island, an arts group has come up with this startling innovation: an audience of eighty sits in the large, real Gothic living room while actors perform such old-manor-house plays as *Ten Little Indians* and *The Unexpected Guest* in their actual settings—an old manor house!

Always, though, the problem with mystery on Broadway is that it tends to be dismissed by the critics. As Bob Barry puts it, "Critics tend to review mysteries like they would O'Neill. They don't have much sense of fun. Everybody loves a thriller. Broadway needs at least one good mystery play a season." I'll buy seats for that.

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"Q"

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THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

The time is 1957, the place Memphis, Tennessee. Three whites plan to kidnap the grandson of a wealthy black businessman. They figure with racial tensions high and Arkansas' Governor Faubus dominating every newscast and front page, no crime against blacks is likely to receive much attention from the white man's legal system.

So begins a beautifully crafted and written novel, the first in twenty-four years by a distinguished Civil War historian.

****Shelby Foote: *September September,* Random House, $8.95. Though unquestionably a novel of crime and suspense, Foote's leisurely-paced tale centers on people rather than plot twists. The trio of kidnapers and the victim's family are depicted with almost equal sympathy and sensitivity. The conclusion is both just and inevitable.

****Michael Z. Lewin: *The Silent Salesman,* Knopf, $7.95. Funny, self-pitying Indianapolis dick Albert Samson is one of the most distinctive, individual voices among current private eyes. His detectival credo: "I hate investing in questions without getting the dividend of answers." The teenage daughter of Samson's unsuccessful marriage helps him out in his latest case. Their relationship, beautifully handled by Lewin, is the highlight of a novel strong in all areas.

****Peter Dickinson: *Walking Dead,* Pantheon, $6.95. Another distinctive stylist combines adventure story, espionage thriller, and formal whodunit in this story of animal experimenter David Foxe's unnerving experiences in a Caribbean dictatorship. Priceless line of cop-to-suspect dialogue: "These magical slayings are usually straightforward."

***Mike Jahn: *Killer on the Heights,* Fawcett-Gold Medal, $1.75. A bigoted New York cop narrates the story of a series of murders of blacks in Morningside Heights. Told in short takes often reminiscent of Vonnegut and Brautigan and full of entertaining bad-taste jokes, the novel has a nicely worked out, though possibly guessable, surprise solution. One of the better paperback originals of recent months.

***James Reid: *The Offering,* Putnam, $8.95. This first novel focuses on moral dilemmas—of Irish Americans supporting, directly or indirectly, the IRA, and of yet another Catholic priest struggling with his vow of chastity. Reid writes smoothly and makes you care about his characters, though he goes a little too didactic toward the end.

***Richard Forrest: *Death Through the Looking Glass,*

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Bobbs-Merrill, $7.95. Husband-and-wife detective team Lyon (writer of children's books) and Beatrice (Secretary of State of Connecticut) Wentworth return in a light whodunit à la Lockridge. Though a TV sit-com aura hovers over the Wentworths' domestic problems, the novel is highly recommended for its background of flying and hot-air ballooning and its tricky but fairly clued puzzle.

***John Franklin Bardin: *Purloining Tiny,* Harper and Row, $7.95. Bardin's first suspense novel in a quarter century is a curious one, quickly readable but slowly understood, featuring abnormal psychology, kinky sex, and odd but involving characters, particularly Tiny, the kidnaped contortionist and magician's assistant, and Harry, her murderous long-lost father. A strong candidate for the mystery field's comeback-of-the year award, if there were one.

***Andrew York: *Tallant for Disaster,* Doubleday-Crime Club, $7.95. Caribbean police chief Munroe Tallant, a sleuth equally suited to action and deduction, must raise a Spanish ship sunk in 1521 as well as solving a series of murders. Slick professional job from a writer also known as Christopher Nicole.

**Jack Donahue: *The Lady Loved Too Well,* McGraw-Hill, $9.95. Houston lawyer Harlan Cole is an obvious attempt to create a new Perry Mason, and we could use one. All the elements seem to be present: Della Streetish secretary, Paul Drake-like private eye, Hamilton Burger-type D.A. What is missing is Erle Stanley Gardner's incomparable sense of pace.

Readers who like true detective stories as well as fictional ones should read Jonathan Goodman's *The Burning of Evelyn Foster* (Scribners, $8.95), an excellent reconstruction of an unsolved English crime of 1931. Goodman's account describes police work quite as inept as any depicted in novels of the crime's era. His detective work at a distance of 36 years turns up a satisfactorily probable suspect.

Two of the three novelettes in Murray Leinster's reissued 1964 collection, *Doctor to the Stars* (Jove/HBJ, $1.50), are clearly detective as well as science fiction stories. The sleuth is Calhoun of the Interstellar Medical Service, accompanied in his planet-hopping by a furry and useful colleague, Murgatroyd the *tormal.* Best story is an ingenious variation on the *Marie Celeste* mystery.

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

THE LIARS, by Peter Hill. Houghton Mifflin, $6.95.

When the battered body of a young fisherman is found hanging by one leg from an ancient gibbet above the Coast of Cornwall, Chief Inspector Staunton and Inspector Wyndsor are sent from London to investigate. They soon discover that more than one person had reason to hope for his death, among them a crippled old lady confined to her room, and they must sort the honest villagers from the liars. "Peter Hill does a fine job with character, plot, atmosphere and suspense. The result is an engaging, witty and entertaining yarn." —*Publishers Weekly.*

THE BLOND BABOON, by Janwillem van de Wetering. Houghton Mifflin, $7.95.

The fifth novel featuring the world's most interesting detectives —the Dutch duo of Grijpstra and de Gier, who are as apt to speculate on the mysteries of life as on the mysteries of their current case. A former nightclub singer lies dead at the foot of her garden steps. The suspects in her murder range from her cop-seducing daughter to the Blond Baboon himself, one of the most unusual characters ever to appear in a detective story. "High class . . . engrossing reading." —*Publishers Weekly.* Selection of the Detective Book Club.

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
Bardin, John Franklin	PURLOINING TINY	Harper & Row	$7.95	$6.35
Dickinson, Peter	WALKING DEAD	Pantheon	6.95	5.50
Donahue, Jack	THE LADY LOVED TOO WELL	McGraw-Hill	9.95	7.95
Foote, Shelby	SEPTEMBER SEPTEMBER	Random House	8.95	6.95
Forrest, Richard	DEATH THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS	Bobbs-Merrill	7.95	6.35
Goodman, Jonathan	THE BURNING OF EVELYN FOSTER	Scribners	8.95	6.95
Hill, Peter	THE LIARS	Houghton Mifflin	6.95	5.50
Lewin, Michael Z.	THE SILENT SALESMAN	Knopf	7.95	6.35
Oates, Joyce Carol	NIGHT-SIDE	Vanguard	10.00	8.00
Reid, James	THE OFFERING	Putnam	8.95	6.95
van de Wetering, Janwillem	THE BLOND BABOON	Houghton Mifflin	7.95	6.35
Wolff, Geoffrey	INKLINGS	Random House	7.95	6.35
York, Andrew	TALLANT FOR DISASTER	Doubleday Crime Club	7.95	6.35

*PLEASE NOTE: ADD 10% TO DISCOUNT PRICE ON ALL CANADIAN ORDERS.

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a *NEW* Milo Turner story by

FRANCIS M. NEVINS, Jr.

It is not always easy for a criminal in fiction to remain a crook (what might be called the Jimmy Valentine Syndrome). The pressure of a sense of morality? The ultimate triumph of good over evil? The influence, overt or hidden, of the reading public? We don't know the reason, or combination of reasons—but fictional criminals seem irresistibly pulled from outside the law to inside. For example, Maurice Leblanc's Arsène Lupin started his career as France's superthief, but ended it as the Gallic supersleuth (an echo of Vidocq's reformation in real life?). In America Edward D. Hoch's unique criminal, Nick Velvet, discovered that to be a topnotch thief he first had to be a topnotch 'tec (not reformation exactly, but a strong pull in the right direction). And now Francis M. Nevins, Jr.'s con man, Milo Turner, is turning inevitably to detection . . .

The author informs us that as far as he knows, this adventure of Milo Turner is "the first mystery story to make use of the hobby of film collecting and the movie-nostalgia conventions as a background"—and we enthusiastically take Mr. Nevins' word for it . . .

FILMFLAM

by *FRANCIS M. NEVINS, Jr.*

The old man brought back a flood of memories. He reclined against a pile of cushions on my davenport, breathing raggedly, gnarled fingers twisting the heavy cane across his lap. His hair was gray and thin now, his gaze vacant, but that wrinkled and liver-spotted face with the frozen-looking expression on its left profile was still unmistakably the evil phiz of Buster Domke, villain in dozens of the B Western movies of my Saturday matinee

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boyhood. The young woman who had accompanied him to my L.A. hideaway called herself Tina Noel and claimed to be both Buster's niece and his nurse. She was tall and honey-tan, wore her hair long and loose, and was lushly endowed with the attributes of cinematic success.

"We don't want to prosecute him, Mr. Turner," she insisted. "We don't even want the six thousand back, just the tapes. God, hours of inside Hollywood history and it'll all be lost if that—" She groped for the proper word, remembering that I was a member of the same profession.

"Con man," I filled in helpfully.

"If he tapes over Uncle Bus's material before you can reach him," she finished. Buster Domke just sat there on the davenport, nodding mechanically.

In a screwy way the job made sense. Five months ago a bright redbearded young man had called on the retired but not yet disabled Domke and introduced himself as Ronald Stephenson. He had said he was a freelance writer and an old-movie freak, working on a definitive history of the B Western. Could he have the privilege of taping an interview with Buster about his years as one of the foremost villains of that genre?

Over the next few days he had bought the old man gourmet dinners, lubricated him with choice blends of liquor, lavished flattery and nostalgia on him, and soon had him opened up like a sardine can. Anecdotes and reminiscences of all the top cowboys of the Thirties and Forties—Buck Jones, Tex Ritter, Brett Kane, Roy Rogers—had poured out of the old-timer in a torrent, and Stephenson had captured them all on his portable cassette recorder.

Domke had worn the black hat in dozens of B Westerns and was a living storehouse for the kind of unsanitized reportage that the studios had paid fortunes to hush up during Hollywood's golden age. All the stories about who hated whom were squirreled away in Domke's prodigious memory—and stayed there until this Stephenson had come into his life, and driven out of it with ten or twelve cassettefuls of those stories plus $6000 of the old man's savings, which was supposed to finance the conversion of the tapes into an autobiography.

About a month after Stephenson's scam, Domke had suffered a stroke and Tina Noel had come west to care for her uncle. It was she who wanted the tapes back. "I have a boy friend in publishing

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who says Uncle Bus can clear thirty or maybe forty thousand on his life story if it's marketed right." On the reasonable hypothesis that it takes one to catch one, she had used another boy friend who had underworld contacts to get in touch with me and hire me to find Stephenson and buy or steal those tapes. "After all, they're worthless to him now that he's gotten Uncle Bus's money."

Her persuasiveness, not to mention her other endowments, finally won me. "All right. I'm not a licensed detective but business has been slow lately and for a two-thousand-dollar fee plus expenses I'll stretch a point. Now describe this Stephenson to me again."

"I'm sorry I can't do better," she said, bending forward gorgeously, "but I didn't come out here till after Uncle Bus's stroke and by then the man was long gone. All I could get from Uncle is that he was tall, thin, about twenty-five, had a red beard and a lot of freckles, knew an incredible lot about B Westerns, and was a genius at getting people to talk freely."

"Rings no bells," I told her. "But maybe I can find him anyway. If he's working this scam on other old movie people he may be using the same tapes over and over, or maybe he really is a movie freak and saves the cassettes for their historical value."

I stood politely as Tina helped her uncle to his feet, and with her certified check for my advance of $1000 tucked snugly in my breast pocket I escorted them out of my apartment and down the long white corridor to the elevator. "I'll keep in touch," I promised. "Mr. Domke, I wish we could have met sooner. I've admired you for thirty-five years."

"Any time, any time," Buster mumbled hollowly. "Always a pleasure." As the cage door slid shut between us I recalled how malevolently noble he had looked in his prime, like Milton's Satan astride a midnight black stallion, and almost had to blink back a tear. But then, I always was a sentimentalist.

I went back to my hideyhole, set the deadbolt and the chain lock, cleared away my guests' glasses, poured myself a fresh jolt of Southern Comfort on the rocks, and thought a bit. Two sips later I gave up and reached for the easy way out. I plunked down on the carpet near the phone and dialed the genial proprietor of the world's only human supermarket, Jock Schultz.

"... You read me right, Jocko, I couldn't turn the chick down. Thanks for steering her to me. Now maybe you can help me help her."

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The Jock didn't seem all that eager to lend a hand. "I—ah—received the impression, when her boy friend talked to me, that she wanted to find some fellow who had cut himself a chunk of her uncle's bankroll. Now, Milo, we can't betray another member of the profession."

"I know the union rules," I sighed. "All she wants is for me to buy some worthless tapes from this other guy. But, Jocko, I never heard of anyone with the description she gave who worked that kind of scam." I repeated Tina's word picture of Stephenson and then popped the big question. "Who is this new man in the game, Jock? What do you know about him?"

He waited a minute as if debating how much he should spill. "All right," he agreed at last, "as long as you guarantee it's ethical. Have you ever heard of the brave new hobby of film collecting?"

"Film collecting? You mean to tell me some people collect movies the way others go after stamps or coins or old beer bottles?"

"Thousands of people, in all walks of life, all over the land. If it sounds strange to you, think how a medieval monk would have reacted to the notion of people owning copies of the books they read. It's the wave of the future, my boy. A few collectors restrict themselves to 35mm prints but that requires a complete theater in the home and a monstrous lot of storage space, so most of 'em stick to the 16mm prints which are lighter and much cheaper. A fair number of collectors specialize in one type of movie—old horror films or comedies or cartoons—or Westerns. May I suggest that you research the subject in rapid order."

"Why the hurry?" I asked him.

"The Western film collectors throw festivals every year," the Jock explained patiently. "A big one opens in Nashville next week. The collectors who organize these affairs pay the expenses of six or eight old cowboy movie people who fly down and chat with the fans and share memories. If young carrot-top is still working the same game he may well go to Nashville to line up more marks."

Which, translated from Jockian into English, meant that he had reliable word Stephenson was indeed on the same scam and was definitely going to Nashville. "Sounds logical," I murmured smoothly. "Worth a try anyway. Thanks a mil, Jock, I'll talk to you soon."

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Early the next morning I put in a long-distance call to the Nashville Chamber of Commerce and quickly convinced a magnolia-kissed voice on the other end that I was an L.A. *Times* reporter doing a piece on the old cowboy stars who were coming to the festival. Miss Cornpone cooperated bounteously with dates, times, places, the names of the festival organizers and of the invited guests. Russell Hayden! Peggy Stewart! I. Stanford Jolley! Ah, those memories of Saturday afternoons in the front row at the Odeon, bouncing in my seat to the rhythm of the action. The chase music, the gorgeous running inserts, the flying leaps, the dance-like fistfights. Almost 30 years had drained off my life since I'd last seen a B Western, and I relished the prospect of looking at some again.

But first I paid a visit to the L.A. Public Library and checked out every book they had on the life and times of that fabulous genre. I lugged the books back to my pad, curled up on the davenport where Buster Domke had sat, and glutted myself on nostalgia.

At 8:17 P.M. five evenings later the jumbojet from L.A. touched down at Nashville's pocket-sized airport. I collected my gear from the onboard storage bin and grabbed a cab to the Talltree Inn where the festival was to open next morning. The hotel was in the heart of the city, a high steel-and-glass finger surrounded by new buildings that the country-western music boom had brought to the sleepy old community. Standing in the broad spacious lobby you could look straight up 24 stories to the top. The rooms were on the east and west walls, all of them facing waist-high balconies and the huge central well, and on the south side four glass-walled elevators studded with electric bulbs rose and dropped continually in a dizzying light show.

I took my place in the line near the registration desk, surrounded by paunchy middle-aged men in ten-gallon hats and vaguely Western leisure suits, chatting in heavily Southern accents on one topic and one only. "I surely wish pore ole Johnny Mack Brown coulda made one of these here conventions before he passed away." "Got two mint original Ken Maynards I'm lookin' to trade for some Tim McCoys." "Haven't seen Russ or Peggy yet but Wild Bill Wentworth was in the cocktail lounge a while ago."

I tested my newly acquired expertise by trying to identify every allusion to a B Western personality, scored passably high, and

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snagged myself a room on 16 West under the name of Grover P. York, accountant, of Tatamy, Pennsylvania, which is one of several nondescript identities I keep, so to speak, in my hip pocket. The bellgirl led me through knots of fans and collectors swapping hobbytalk into the science-fictional elevator and up to the sixteenth floor.

Gear stowed away, I stretched on the queen-size bed, balanced the phone on my chest, and dialed the hotel operator. "Could I have Mr. Ronald Stephenson's room number, please? . . . Well, could you tell me if he has a reservation? . . . Thanks just the same." Which established that if redbeard was among the sagebrush brigade he was using another name. But freckled as he was, I didn't think I could mistake what he used for a face. I freshened up, changed into chinos and a cactus-print sports shirt, and buzzed down to the lobby to get oriented.

Once every few years I feel the presence of a guardian angel watching over me. As the elevator dropped me toward ground level I faced the glass rear wall and looked down at the panorama of lights and open space and chandeliers hanging on mile-long chains, and people the size of midgets, and suddenly there he was. Riding the Up escalator from the lobby to the mezzanine, growing big as life as he rose and I descended. A tall thin young man, beardless but with neatly trimmed hair the color of a freshly painted fire engine and enough freckles for a one-man St. Patrick's Day parade.

I stabbed the button for Mezzanine, dashed out, scanned the visible area on all sides, and blast it, in the few seconds the elevator had taken to reach that floor, he'd dematerialized. At first I thought he'd gone into one of the eight or ten meeting rooms but then I realized that the festival didn't begin till tomorrow morning, so the rooms must be locked for the night. That left only one likely destination for him on this floor, and I trotted down the corridor till I passed the swinging cedar door labeled *MEN*. I parked myself behind a pillar and waited for him to show.

Three minutes later, when he poked through the swing door and headed back for the escalator, I glanced around, saw we had the area to ourselves, and took a long chance. I tiptoed behind him till I was almost close enough to touch his freckled neck, then I called out, "Ron Stephenson! How's life, old buddy?"

He froze like Lot's wife, the backs of his ears turned red, and very cautiously, so as to gain time to recover his cool, he pivoted

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to face me. "Sorry, friend," he smiled thinly, pointing to the convention name-tag pinned to his beige T-shirt. "You got the wrong guy. My name's Bob Saunders."

I mumbled a sheepish apology and ducked into the john till he'd vacated the area. Then I headed for the house phone on the mezzanine and spoke to another hotel operator. "Could I have the room number of Mr. Robert Saunders, please?"

Jotting down 1407 on a scrap of paper, I reflected that being a detective seemed an easier way to make a living than being a con man. I'd give him a few hours to socialize with the marks, then around midnight I'd pay him a visit and make my pitch about the tapes. I boarded the Down escalator to the lobby, aiming to patronize the bar.

And all of a sudden my guardian angel gave me another nudge. Whom did I spot standing in the line before the registration desk but a certain young woman, tall and honey-tan and with hair worn long and loose, who was supposed to be 3000 miles due west of Nashville playing nurse to dear old Uncle Bus! It looked as if I was playing in a deeper game than I'd been told.

I set my traveling alarm clock for midnight, doused the lights, snatched a snooze, and at 20 minutes into the new day I took the fire stairs down two flights, crossed to the east wing, and knocked on 1407. There was a crawling kind of noise from behind the door, and some groans. The sounds came nearer and the door inched open just enough so I could see someone sprawled in the darkness of the entrance foyer.

I wedged myself in and stared down at a young carrot-top who looked like he'd been bounced around the inside of a laundry dryer. His lips were puffy, his T-shirt ripped, his freckles overlaid with ripe bruises. The room was a mess, as if a wild ape had been pawing through its contents. I kicked the door shut and helped him to the bed, then soaked bathtowels in cold water to bring him around.

"Who mistook you for a tackling dummy?" I asked when he was more or less coherent again.

He muttered, "No one. It's private, I can handle it myself."

"You look it," I told him. "Come on, Stephenson, this is business. In case you don't recognize me through that shiner, I'm the guy who stopped you on the mezzanine. I want to buy those tapes you made with Buster Domke five months ago if you haven't

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erased them yet. I'll go as high as five hundred." Actually my limit was considerably higher, but that didn't concern him. "They're worthless to you but Domke can make a tidy sum if they're turned into his life story."

He lay there thinking, the wheels turning almost visibly behind his blackening eyes. "Mister, either you're a damn fool or someone's conned you. My God, you can't sell your autobiography to a publisher these days unless you were a superstar, and except for these old-time Western nuts who the hell ever heard of Buster Domke?" Then his eyes got shrewd and cautious and he rolled out of bed, groped among the spare blankets in the bottom dresser drawer, and came up with a .45 automatic in his fist.

"You think I didn't recognize you downstairs? You think I'm dumb enough to believe Milo Turner was scammed by a half-paralyzed old man? Look, you know why those tapes are worth a mint, and I know, and I know you know, but it was me he told how Kane was killed, not you, so you can just go dig a hole for yourself, get me?" So high was his dudgeon his voice had climbed to almost a screech.

"Stephenson, you overestimate me drastically," I protested in all modesty, hands duly raised. "But okay, it's your ball game. May I leave the room?"

He waved me out with the barrel of his .45. I toyed with the notion of politely instructing him that you had to cock the hammer before you could fire that weapon, but chose to leave the damn fool in his ignorant bliss. I backed into the corridor and headed for the fire stairs and the rest of my night's sleep.

Next morning I checked in at the festival desk on the mezzanine and in return for my twenty bucks was given a plastic-covered badge in the name of Grover P. York, a convention program, a guide to eating out in Nashville, and a floor plan of the hotel. A bulletin board behind the registration tables was jammed with typed and handwritten offers to buy, sell, or swap B Westerns, and a wall poster listed the special guest stars of this year's festival. Russell Hayden, famous as Hopalong Cassidy's sidekick Lucky. Peggy Stewart, queen of the B Westerns. I. Stanford Jolley, notorious Western-film badman. James Mandell, Brett Kane's young pal Buddy in the Arizona Rider series. William Wentworth, director of dozens of classic B Westerns.

I studied my program, analyzed the titles of the six features

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that were playing simultaneously in the six screening rooms at this hour, took a gamble on something called *Rawhide Mail* starring Jack Perrin, whoever he was, and walked out after ten truly ghastly minutes. Down the hall another screening room was showing a Hoppy feature called *Lumberjack*. I sampled it, liked what I saw enormously, and stayed to the end. People kept drifting in and out of the rooms, watching a snatch of action, going out to grab a smoke or a cup of coffee or just to chat with other fans or tour the dealers' room where 50 or 60 merchants of nostalgia had set up shop on folding tables covered with green cloth and were offering films, movie books, posters, publicity stills, and every other known variety of cowboy memorabilia.

Rich and poor, young and old, male and female, everyone wore just a shirt and slacks or jeans at these festivals. There were no social distinctions: if you loved those great old low-budget all-but-interchangeable flicks, you belonged. Before the afternoon break I had caught a Lash LaRue, a Sunset Carson, a Don Barry, and pieces of two Gene Autrys. But not once did I catch a glimpse of Tina Noel or Mr. Carrot Thatch, and I began to wonder if they were off somewhere together.

Around 4:00 P.M. the screening rooms emptied and everyone trooped down to the hotel's Grand Ballroom for the daily event known as the Panel of Stars. Three or four of the invited guests sat on the dais and fielded questions from the throng of collectors and fans. "Mr. Hayden, how did you like playing Lucky in the Hoppy pictures?" "Would Miss Stewart tell us about working with Sunset Carson?" The answers were all cut to the same measure: everyone was a gentleman and a scholar, a prince of a fellow, and a joy to work with. That was what the fans had come to hear. To be told that one of their old idols had been a rummy, or beat his horse, or pawed every woman in sight, would be like going to church and hearing the preacher say that God never existed.

Somehow, in the middle of the ritual q-and-a, my brain sprang out of neutral and I understood what that cryptic reference of Stephenson's to Kane being killed must mean. I raised an eager hand and in due course was recognized from the dais.

"Mr. Mandell," I boomed out, "could you tell us about Brett Kane?"

With his steel-gray hair and his big burly frame James Mandell looked like a veteran truck driver, except that he wore leather gloves as if his hands were cold in that excessively air-conditioned

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room—or as if they'd been bruised in a fistfight. Coming into the ballroom during the introduction of the guests, I'd heard the master of ceremonies say that Kane had retired from the movies 20 years ago.

"Brett Kane," he repeated in a whiskey baritone, the name carrying him back to the simpler days when he'd played the Arizona Rider's teen-age pal Buddy. "Brett Kane was a tough, feisty, hard-working, loving man. I rode beside him in, oh, sixteen Arizona pictures—that was 1938 to 1940. Spence Bennet directed half and ole Wild Bill there did the rest." He swung his head to the medium-sized middle-aged man at the end of the dais. "Buster Domke was the bad guy in most of them. Regular little old stock company we had." As if on cue the fans gave a round of loud applause for good old Buster.

I took my head in my hands and asked what I thought might be an unpopular question but from my point of view a necessary one. "Could you tell us how Brett Kane died?" I called out.

The man at the end of the dais reached for the microphone. William Wentworth, the Alfred Hitchcock of the low-budget action directors as I'd heard someone call him. His craggy face looked long and deeply lived in, and his eyes gleamed half with delight and half with grief. "I directed the last Arizona Rider picture," he said into the mike, "oh, hell, what was its name, *Across the Badlands* or something. It was the last few scenes, we were shooting Brett chasing Buster Domke on horseback, and Buster had emptied his .45 at Brett, then tossed it away. The gun was supposed to be important evidence in the story, so I told Brett to sort of swoop over in the saddle when he rode past the gun and skim it up at full gallop.

"Well, I've always been a bug about getting the action scenes to look right, so we took our time and shot that chase and pickup from a bunch of different camera angles, something we almost never did on those B pictures. Finally about the seventh time poor Brett just sort of keeled over in the saddle and hit the dirt. Well, we called Linda, that was his wife, loveliest girl on God's earth, and we rushed him to the hospital, but it was too late. Turned out the poor guy had known for a month that his heart had gone bad but he was too damn proud to tell anyone but his best friend, Buster Domke. That's how Brett Kane died—in the saddle."

There was an uncomfortable silence in the huge room, then someone started clapping and within seconds the whole room was

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applauding the memory of a cowboy who had died with his boots on.

I made this my cue to slip quietly out of the ballroom. I'd been scanning the room every few minutes during the questions and answers and still saw no sign of Stephenson or Tina. I decided to run up to 1407, and if it seemed vacant, to use my skeleton keys and do a quickie search. As I left the room a chubby teenager was asking Russ Hayden whether he thought Gabby Hayes or Andy Clyde was the funnier cowboy comedian.

I stepped out of the elevator and sighted across the central well on a diagonal line. At the far end of the east wing, three or four rooms beyond Stephenson's, a wheeled housekeeping cart stood at an open door. It was late in the day for the maids still to be cleaning, but with the festival the hotel was fuller than usual. The door to 1407 was shut tight.

But not for long. After I had kept watch for three or four minutes the door eased open a few inches, then all the way, and my elusive client Tina Noel came flying out into the hallway toward me without even bothering to close the door behind her. I ran to intercept her at the junction of the south and east corridors, grabbed her from behind with a hand over her mouth as she raced past me. I pulled her through the door to the fire stairs and sat her down on the chilly concrete floor. "Okay," I said gently, fingers still against her mouth. "Easy now, no screams, just take a deep breath and start talking."

"He's dead oh God he's dead," she kept repeating like a stuck record. "I knocked on his door and it was a little bit open and I walked in and he was on the floor with blood all over his head and a gun with a bloody butt in the bathroom doorway and then I realized the maid was a couple of doors away so I had to stay there with oh my God with his body until she was out of sight and then I ran."

"Did you take anything?"

"N-n-no!" In that tight blouse and slacks there didn't seem room to conceal anything, so this once I believed her.

"Touch anything?"

"No. I don't know. Yes. Maybe. Oh God, how can I remember?" Her voice rose to the edge of hysteria and I made a move to cover her mouth again but she seemed to get over it then. "What are we going to do, call the police or—"

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A sharp loud screech, muffled by the walls, cut off her question. I peeped through the square pane of glass set into the fire door at eye level and saw the maid rocketing down the corridor toward the elevators.

"It's being done," I reported confidently. "Come on now, on your feet and up two flights to my room. I'll give you a stiff drink and hold your dainty little hand, and you will spill your soul out."

And after downing most of my Southern Comfort, she did.

"I have this boy friend on the L.A. bunco squad, and after Uncle Bus and I spoke to you, well, I thought I'd ask this boy friend if the police knew anything about Ronald Stephenson, so I described him the way I did for you."

"You have a boy friend for every occasion," I remarked.

"He came up with this young con man who's used a lot of different names," she went on as if she hadn't heard me, "and taken several old-timers in the entertainment business for a few thousand pieces. He even gave me a copy of a police artist's sketch of what the man looked like, and then he checked with some informants and found out the man was about to leave for Nashville. Well, a month ago Uncle Bus got an invitation to be a guest at this festival, so I figured Stephenson was coming here to work his con on more old-timers. That's why I left Uncle Bus with the housekeeper for a few days and came here too."

"Without bothering to contact me before or after you arrived," I added in an injured tone. "What were you going to do, use your charms to get the tapes from him?"

"If I had to," she said. "I just circulated around the hotel last night till I spotted someone who resembled that artist's sketch, and then I casually bumped into him and, well, didn't discourage him."

"Fast work," I commented admiringly. "When I saw him about 12:30 this morning he mentioned Buster's stroke, which didn't happen till a month after he'd conned your uncle, so I knew you and he had gotten together. What time did you leave him last night?"

"Ten thirty or so. He invited me to come back today for a drink before dinner," she explained euphemistically. "I thought I could search his room and maybe find the tapes while he was asleep."

"Did you see him or talk to him between eleven last night and just now?"

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"No!" She half choked on the word. "I spent the day shopping, just got back an hour ago. My God, you don't think *I* killed him!"

"For what those tapes are worth you might have," I said wisely. Milo's Maxim #37: When you know nothing, pretend you know everything.

It worked. She bit down troubledly on her luscious lower lip and gazed up at me. "Then you know about Brett Kane's heart attack."

"And the horse and gun stunt and the whole works," I lied brilliantly. "Stephenson spilled the beans last night."

"Then you know there's enough in it for both of us." She treated me to a suggestive smile and wriggled a bit in her chair. "Let's be partners, Milo, okay? Uncle Bus has money, I'll take him and a fifth of what you collect elsewhere, and the rest's all yours."

This woman would have been a survivor even in Machiavelli's Italy. There was something about her coldbloodedness that sent a needle spray of fear down my backbone. "I'll think about it," I told her noncommittally. "Later. Right now I've got an espionage mission. You stay where you're sitting, I'll be back."

Being two stories above and almost directly across the central well from the corpse's room, I was ideally located for rubbernecking. The panel had broken up downstairs and the fans and collectors were streaming back to their rooms to get cleaned up before dinner. Those who had sharp eyes and were well situated as I was could tell that something unusual was happening in Room 1407. The more curious among them stood or crouched at various strategic points along the balconies, making me much less conspicuous as I watched.

The plainsclothesmen and evidence technicians seemed to be well into their routine. My guess was that at first they'd treat it casually as the work of a sneak thief surprised by an unexpectedly returning guest. Then when they checked the registration on the .45 and learned from the medical examiner's report that the corpse had been in another brawl 16 hours or so before his death, and ran into blank walls trying to notify the so-called Robert Saunders' relatives, they'd get serious about investigating and forget about the sensitivities of the hotel management. I figured I had until tomorrow morning at most to make my move. I came in from my balcony observation post, shut the door, went over to Tina on the bed, and issued my marching orders.

"You go back downstairs and mingle. Find James Mandell, the

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guest star who wears the gloves." I tore out of my convention booklet the page with the photo of Brett Kane's teen-age sidekick as he looked today. "Don't attract his attention but watch him. If anyone looking like a cop approaches him, exit gracefully, go to your room, and wait. Report back here at ten tonight."

I hustled her out, checked my billfold, rode downstairs to get a five changed into quarters at the front desk, and cabbed to the local Greyhound terminal where I used a pay phone to call L.A.

"Yeah, Jock, it's me. In Nashville. Is the supermarket still open? Good, because I need to convince some people that I'm a detective on whatever they call the homicide squad in this burg. Who can fix me up with ID? . . . Thanks a ton, Jocko, I'll tell you why later." I hung up, dialed the number of the friendly local document forger Jock had given me, made arrangements to pick up my police credentials at 9:30, and killed the intervening time over bourbon and rare sirloin at a charcoal grill.

By 10:25 I was back in my room, listening to Tina report that no one who smelled official had come near Mandell. "Beautiful," I said. "Where was he when you left him?"

"Down in Screening Room Two. They're running an Arizona Rider film."

I told her to go back to her room and hang loose, rode down to the mezzanine, and sauntered into the screening room. It was dark, lit only by the projector lamp and cigarette glows, but filled with the noise of gunshots and hoofbeats. I spotted Mandell in the back row, still wearing those gloves, watching his forty-years-younger image in the time-mirror of the film. I let him commune with his memories until the final action scene was over, then I gave him a gentle tap on the shoulder.

"Lupton, hotel security," I introduced myself softly in the Southern accent I had picked up by osmosis from the evening newscasts since the last election. "Mr. Mandell, we have a guest named Robert Saunders who claims you assaulted him last night. I'd like to speak to you privately about it, if you don't mind, sir."

He stared at me through truckdriver-tough eyes as if I were a talking fruitcake and slapped his gloved hands together in the chilly room. "Me? Assault someone? With these?" he whispered over the strains of the dialogue on the screen. "Mr. Lupton, there was a time when I scrapped quite a bit, and generally came out on top. But not since '72. Not since the chemical explosion in my plant that winter." He hesitated, then slid his hands between his

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thighs and shucked both of his gloves off. "Go ahead, feel them before they turn the lights up."

I ran my fingers over his. They felt cold and lifeless, like the hands of a department-store mannequin magically endowed with mobility. Flexible hands, made of some kind of plastic, good for eating and other simple operations, but no good at all for a fistfight. Or for beating a man to death with the butt end of a .45 automatic.

"I was lucky that explosion didn't take more than my hands," Mandell whispered. "That's why I wear gloves whenever I can. Now will you believe me that this Saunders, whoever he is, is full of hooey?"

I apologized with all the Southern courtesy at my command and slipped out of the room as Mandell tugged his gloves back on and Brett Kane's wonder horse White Falcon nudged him into the heroine's arms for the fadeout.

So my first hunch about the identity of Stephenson's assailant had been a ripe juicy lemon. But if it wasn't Mandell that the redhead had been trying to blackmail over Kane's death, there was only one person left in the hotel who fitted.

I found him alone in a booth at the far end of the dimly lit lounge on the basement level, his eyes misted enough to show he'd been lapping the sauce for at least a couple of hours. Now that I saw his hands close-up for the first time, I noticed that the knuckles were raw and bruised as if they'd been in a recent fight. I squeezed in beside him and flashed my shiny new ID.

"Lieutenant Winningham," I identified myself in what I hoped was a soothing Southern monotone. "We know pretty much what happened up in Room 1407, sir, if you'd like to tell us about it."

For the second time that day Milo's Maxim #37 proved its value. William Wentworth needed to unburden himself to someone and he was just lit enough not to question my official status. "Yeah," he said heavily. "Sure, I'll tell you. Buy you a drink?"

"Sorry, sir, I'm on duty," I replied virtuously. "Don't let it stop you, though."

He signaled the redcoated barman for another double Johnnie Walker. "I don't suppose you know much about B Westerns, Lieutenant, or the people that made them. We were a bunch of wild roughnecks, but we were a real community. Actors, directors, stuntmen, photographers—most of us anyway. We worked our

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butts off out in the boonies every day and got drunk as skunks every night and were back on the set at eight the next morning like nothing had happened. I was about twenty-five, and getting the contract to direct half the Arizona Riders was my first big break. I started to work with Buster Domke and Jimmy Mandell and Brett Kane.

"Some guy at the panel today asked what Kane was like." I modestly forbore to reveal that the guy was me. "Jimmy said Kane was the finest man on God's green earth, because that's what the fans came to hear. It was a damn lie. Brett Kane was a sick sadistic animal. He liked to make people hurt, women especially. He beat that lovely wife of his so bad she couldn't wear a bathing suit for all the marks he left on her. I was involved with Linda for a while before she married Kane, but I knew if I tried to do anything he'd get me blackballed as a director and ruin me. He enjoyed doing stuff like that.

"Well, they shot half the Rider pictures in Utah and half on the back lot in L.A. When Kane was in Utah with the other director and the crew, Linda, well, she'd come stay with me. I tried to talk her into leaving him but she was afraid. He'd told her he'd throw acid in her face if she ever tried to leave. Listening to her and seeing what he'd turned her into was like a chain saw tearing me up inside.

"To cut it short, Buster Domke and I went out drinking one night about a month before it happened. Buster got drunk and let it slip that he'd driven Kane to the doctor's the day before and that the doc had told Kane he had a bum ticker and if he didn't quit action pictures he'd die. Kane made Domke swear he'd never tell a soul, but Buster never could keep a secret when he was smashed.

"Well, sometime during that spree with Domke I got my idea. I went home that night and looked at the script of the next Rider picture I was going to shoot, and I rewrote it to play up a scene about Domke's gun being important evidence. Then I added a bit where Kane is chasing Domke and swoops down in the saddle and scoops up the gun Domke had dropped. When we went out to do the picture a week later I whizzed through the other scenes so fast it made the cameraman's eyes pop, so I'd have time to shoot that scoop-up sequence over and over.

"I had a rep for taking trouble over my action scenes so it didn't look fishy. We worked out there under that broiling sun and I

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made Kane ride into camera range and bend way over in the saddle at a full gallop and pick up that gun over and over and over till finally he fell off his horse and died, just the way I wanted him to.

"No one suspected a thing, except Buster of course, but he was sweet on Linda too and for her sake he kept his mouth shut. That is, until that redheaded con man got him drunk five months ago and squeezed the story out of him, and then paid a call on me for a contribution. When he learned I was coming to this Nashville wingding he told me he was coming too, to line up more suckers, and that I could buy the tapes down here for ten thousand dollars.

"Well, I visited him last night, knocked him around a little, searched his room, took what tapes I found, and thought that was the end of it. He called me again this morning, said that he had duplicates of all the tapes hidden back in L.A. and that anyway I'd missed the tape where Buster talks about Kane's death. He played me a piece of it over the phone to show he wasn't lying, and told me he was upping the price to twenty thousand down and ten thousand a year for the rest of my life.

"Well, I didn't care about myself, I'm a tired old man and no one's going to prosecute for something that happened back in 1940. But I still cared about Linda, who's alive and happily married and just as lovely as ever and still a dear friend of mine, and I didn't want to see her name in a scandal. So I said I'd see him in his room at 3:30, half an hour before the panel. When I got there he pulled an automatic on me, said he was going to bust my nose with it for the licking I gave him the night before.

"Well, the damn fool hadn't even cocked the hammer, so I rushed him and yanked the gun away and kept smacking him on the head with it till he wasn't moving any more. Guess I smacked him too hard, huh? Then I found that last cassette, took it to my room, cut the tape into little strips, flushed them down the john, and washed up and went down to the panel and listened to Jimmy Mandell tell everyone what a prince Brett Kane was. It was only two hours ago I heard someone in the lobby say there was a guy dead in 1407, and I've been drinking steadily ever since. I'd have gone down to headquarters and confessed before morning."

"I'm glad I found you first," I said, improvising with wild abandon. "You see, sir, our independent investigation bears out your contention that you killed the man in self-defense, and anyway he was a blackmailer and a menace to decent folks from way back.

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We understand things like that down heah, Mr. Wentworth. So why don't you just forget all about it and trust us to close the case in some civilized manner?"

Wentworth stared across at me with a look of incomprehension, as if he'd never dreamed of a homicide cop proposing such an arrangement. He straightened up, pressed his temples between his palms, and gave all the symptoms of a man who's been shocked sober. But my cerebrum was in gear now and roaring like a race car at Le Mans, and nothing was going to keep me from finishing first.

"You know, sir, I've been thinking about that story of yours," I went on. "For almost forty years you've believed that you and you alone were responsible for Brett Kane's death, is that right?"

"Well, of course I was!" The director sounded almost indignant that I would think of denying him the credit.

"As an experienced investigator," I said, "I see the picture differently. Think back on the way it happened, sir. The way that suggestion of how to take advantage of Kane's bad heart just seemed to generate spontaneously that night. Now, isn't it much more likely that the real power behind that suggestion was—what was his name again? Buster Dobkins."

"Domke," he corrected mechanically.

"Whatever. Isn't it much more plausible that this Domke fellow deliberately told you about Kane's heart ailment, and that it was Domke who subtly planted the suggestion during that drinking bout as to how Kane could safely be disposed of? After all, sir, you said yourself that he was sweet on Linda too."

I could tell by his eyes that he was straining to relive that scene, in another dimly lit bar, straining to recapture the nuances of that long-ago night. One minute I thought he'd bought my version, the next his eyes seemed to reject it. Of course, I had a reason to support my version, a reason I was keeping close to my chest. Only if Buster Domke had been implicated in Kane's death in a blackmailable way, and had drunkenly said something incriminating during those taped talks with Stephenson, could Tina Noel have hoped to use the tape to squeeze her uncle dry, as she'd stated to me. Even though Tina herself had never heard the tape, Domke must have let something slip that had tipped her off to what he had done back in 1940, and it stood to reason that during her tête-à-tête with Stephenson last night she had offered him pretty much the same deal she'd made me, with her taking exclusive

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rights to bleed Uncle Bus and twenty percent of whatever Stephenson got elsewhere.

Wentworth's rough-hewn face suddenly seemed to relax, as if an impossible burden had unexpectedly been lifted from his shoulders. "Why, damn it all, you have to be right!" he exploded in a sort of perverse joy. "That Domke, that wily sneaky calculating—oh, hell, if it wasn't for that damn stroke he had I could call him right now and put it to him point-blank and know for sure. But no, I don't need that, I see how it was now, and you're right, Lieutenant. My God, I'm not a killer!"

"Well, Mr. Wentworth," I replied smoothly, "that makes us even. Because I'm no lieutenant." And leaving the Hitchcock of the action film with the world's biggest gape of stupefaction across his craggy kisser, I slid out of the red plush booth and jogged briskly to the nearest exit.

I had no reason to stay in Nashville any longer so I packed my bags that night and checked out and caught a post-midnight flight to Chicago that connected with a non-stop to L.A. I didn't bother to say goodbye to Tina, who was probably still in her room waiting for me to tell her what had happened. Her thousand-buck advance hadn't even covered my expenses thanks to the cost of the fake detective ID, but I decided it was safer to take a loss than go partners with that guileful sexpot. At the first opportunity she'd have slit my throat. She must suspect, of course, that it was Wentworth who'd clubbed the redhead into the hereafter, but she couldn't open her mouth without cooking herself in the stew, and most assuredly she couldn't prove a thing.

As the 747 sailed west across the black velvet sky I debated trying to locate Stephenson's pad in L.A. when I landed and glomming those duplicate tapes of his so no one else could hold them over Buster's or Wentworth's head. I'd enjoyed so many of their movies in my formative years that I figured I owed them that much.

But then, I always was a sentimentalist.

"Q"

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Was the great detective dying? Even in extremis . . .

THE ADVENTURE OF THE BLIND ALLEY

by EDWARD WELLEN

Feeling his way through the pea-soup fog, Police Constable Cooper paused at the noise of a struggle. He stared hard to hear. At the first outcry and the noise of scuffling his hand had whisked to his whistle. But before he could blow a blast to frighten off the attacker, he heard the sickening sound of a cosh on a skull, then the thump of a falling body.

He withheld the blast and with heavy caution, in order to catch the assailant red-handed, he lifted his boots towards the rough breathing and the tearing of cloth.

P.C. Cooper smiled tightly to himself. He knew this to be a narrow cul-de-sac and himself to be between the attacker and escape. He had the culprit all but in his arms.

He winged out his cape and moved slowly but steadily into the blindness of the alley. But a kerb leaped out of nowhere. P.C. Cooper's stumble and his muffled oath warned the attacker. The constable blew a savage blast. "In the name of the law, stand fast!"

P.C. Cooper heard fleeing footsteps, the ring of a hobnailed boot striking an iron mudscraper, then the creak of a door and the snick of a latch. The culprit, then, was a denizen of this unsavoury alley.

The constable swore under his breath. He had his man—and yet he did not have him. He knew there were a half-dozen doors on either hand. Unless the constable located the right door straightway, the culprit would have time to change from his wet outer clothes and to hide what he had stolen from the victim.

The victim. A dozen paces deeper into the alley, and the constable saw the shape of the victim on the cobblestones.

Feeling sudden clamminess and chill, P.C. Cooper stood over the fallen man. He eyed a familiar hawklike profile, a bloodied

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deerstalker cap, a still-clutched violin case. Rents showed in the victim's clothes where hurried hands had torn away a watch chain and snatched a wallet. That the mighty manhunter should have fallen prey to a common robber!

The victim stirred. A word came forth. "Constable . . ."

P.C. Cooper knelt, careless that his knee touched the wet stones. The blood-blinded face had not turned towards him. How had the man known to call him constable?

The whistle, of course. The habits and skills of a lifetime would not have failed him even in the direst of moments. Though stunned, the great detective would have taken note of some clue, and most likely clung to consciousness now solely to impart that clue.

"Sir, did you see your assailant? Can you describe him?"

A painful shake of the head.

"Do you know where he ran to?"

A painful nod.

P.C. Cooper knelt, careless that his knee touched the wet stones. enough to point vaguely and gasp, "A flat . . ."

The constable grimaced in disappointment. The great detective had told P.C. Cooper only what P.C. Cooper already knew.

A flat, indeed! This was an alley of roominghouses—nothing but flats.

P.C. Cooper removed his cape and wadded it under the great detective's head as a cushion. Then the constable rose and duty took over. His whistle guided answering whistles.

Each blast, each echo, ached. It hurt him to think that his colleagues would find him simply standing there, waiting, while the culprit was safe behind one of those unseen doors.

A flat . . .

P.C. Cooper shook his head. Why should those words keep ringing in his mind? They had originated in the poor stricken mind of the great detective.

A flat . . .

Pounding boots pulled up. P.C. Cooper recognised the figure of P.C. Lloyd.

Lloyd was a Welshman, and Welshmen are famous for having perfect pitch.

Swelling with authority, Cooper seized Lloyd's arm and pointed him.

"Man, hurry and kick the mudscrapers with your great hobnailed boots and find the one that sounds A flat."

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The Professor's scheme was foolproof—he said so himself . . .

THE BABY BIT

by JAMES HOLDING

Dixie's voice was warm with approval. "I think it's a perfectly lovely idea!"

"Thank you, my dear," I replied modestly. "If I say so myself, it does seem foolproof. And extremely simple."

"Except," she said, "I don't like the bit about the baby, Professor." She calls me "Professor" because I once attended Dartmouth briefly and, in consequence, express myself with rather more formality than my associates.

I said, "What don't you like about the baby bit, as you call it?"

"It's kidnaping, isn't it?"

Attempting to set her fears at rest (I shan't call them scruples, since Dixie is burdened with no more of these uncomfortable commodities than I am), I said, "Kidnaping? Not at all, Dixie. To constitute a kidnaping in the true sense, there must be a fairly lengthy abduction—with kidnap notes, ransom demands, go-betweens, police, and all the rest of it. In our case we shall be simply *borrowing* a baby for a few minutes, no more than half an hour at most. The baby will be found, almost at once, alive and unharmed. And quite possibly nobody will even realize the baby was borrowed until it is safe home again. That is how I visualize the baby bit, Dixie. So in my judgment you need not concern yourself about kidnaping."

"Okay, Professor," Dixie said. "Your judgment has always been good enough for me." The dear girl! "Where do we find a baby?"

"I thought perhaps you might have a suggestion as to that?"

Dixie's pretty mouth stretched into her teasing smile. "I know a few girls who have babies, yes. But in order to borrow one we'd have to cut them in on the deal. And you don't want that, do you?"

I said with dignity, "I prefer our project to involve as few individuals as possible, Dixie, that is true. For safety's sake, however, rather than from any stinginess on my part—"

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She interrupted me, still teasing. "In that case, Professor, I expect that for a modest fee I could borrow little Elinor from Jackie over there." She jerked a thumb at the cocktail waitress who had but recently served us our drinks at the tiny table we occupied in the Elite Lounge.

"Please be serious, Dixie. We can't borrow a baby from somebody we know. Such an act of folly would later lead the police inexorably to us, can't you see that? No, what I am asking you is, where can we borrow an *anonymous* baby, if you see what I mean?"

This time she gave my question her serious attention. Her forehead wrinkled in thought. After a moment she said, "Two possibilities I can think of offhand."

"Two?"

"Gladstone Park, for one, Professor. In the center of town where the mothers and the nursemaids air their babies every nice day. There are dozens of them."

I shook my head in a decided negative. "Their surveillance is too close and constant to yield us an opportunity of borrowing one of their charges."

"Okay, then. The Forest Avenue Day Care Center. About a hundred kids are parked there every day by parents who have jobs."

"How wise I was to come to you for help in this enterprise, Dixie!" I said. "The Forest Avenue Day Care Center is an inspiration! Do you know anything about the operation of the place?"

"I know all about it, at least from the outside. My apartment is right across the street."

"So?"

"So at ten thirty in the morning on nice days all the kids are let out into the yard for a play period—on the swings and jungle gyms and so on. And the little ones—the babies—are slapped into outdoor playpens for the period, sometimes two or three babies to each pen."

"And watched carefully?"

"Not so carefully that I couldn't sneak through the hedge and borrow one if I wanted to. Easiest thing in the world."

"And the baby wouldn't be missed immediately?"

"Not likely. Not until they count noses at the end of the play period. I've seen them doing it. The staff uses the play period as a partial coffee break of their own."

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"Excellent," I said with satisfaction. "Now then. What kind of baby conveyance would you suggest?"

"A stroller," she answered without hesitation. "It's more compact than a fancy perambulator, displays the child more effectively, and is easier to get into a station wagon."

I nodded in agreement.

"So what we'll want," said Dixie, "is a kid about ten or eleven months old, right? Big enough to sit up in a stroller, but not big enough to be walking around by himself."

"Exactly. And Dixie, I suggest that you wear your wig and a pair of those large sunglasses."

"And a scarf around my wig," she said, "and I'll guarantee you'll never recognize me, Professor."

I smiled at her. "Good. Next question. Which establishment shall we honor with our patronage?"

"Harding's," she said at once. "Who else? It's the best in town. And their ad in the newspaper announcing the Special of the Week will tell me what to ask for."

I felt more and more pleased with Dixie. She is an invaluable ally. Usually I need only present her with the mere outline of a workable idea and she begins at once to flesh out my general concept with specific detail.

Her eyes gleamed with excitement now. "Last week's Special would have been a dandy. As the ad said, it would have been a steal"—she twinkled at me—"for seventeen thousand bucks."

"Don't fret, Dixie," I comforted her. "Perhaps next week's Special will be even more spectacular. Meanwhile, let us plan our little shopping tour in detail, shall we?"

The planning didn't take long. Once the baby bit was settled, the rest followed easily.

On Tuesday of the following week, therefore, we acted. At twenty minutes to eleven precisely, I pulled up in my station wagon across the street from Dixie's apartment house on Forest Avenue. Stolen license plates graced the wagon's bumpers, a collapsed baby stroller rested in the back. Through my open window I could hear the carefree shouts and laughter of the children playing in the yard of the Day Care Center beyond the hedge.

Dixie at once emerged from her apartment—a truly unrecognizable Dixie in blonde wig, outsize sunglasses, colorful head scarf. She strolled across the street to the hedge-bordered play yard of the Day Care Center. For just an instant she disappeared through

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a small gap in the hedge, then emerged with a fat smiling baby in her arms. The baby had obviously been lured into complacency by Dixie with a peppermint candy which it held in one sticky hand and sucked on noisily.

When they came abreast of me, I opened the door of my station wagon, and Dixie slipped nimbly into the passenger seat beside me, holding the baby as skillfully as though she were born for motherhood. Instantly I pulled away and accelerated gently toward the downtown section of the city. Behind us, no cries were heard, no alarm was sounded, no signal given to indicate that anyone was as yet aware that an eleven-month-old baby had been abducted from the Forest Avenue Day Care Center.

Ten minutes later, in a narrow alley used largely for deliveries and now deserted, I parked the station wagon. Only fifty paces away, around the corner on Main Street, was Harding's Jewelry Store, our local Tiffany's.

Hurriedly I pulled the collapsed stroller from the rear of the car and made it operational. Dixie plopped the baby into it, strapped the infant in, and draped over its small lap a flimsy white blanket which she must have taken from the Day Care Center with the baby. Then, seizing the handle of the stroller and chirping lovingly to the baby, she disappeared around the corner into the noonday crowds of Main Street. The baby still sucked contentedly on its piece of candy. Dixie's last words to me were, "Keep your motor running, Professor. I shouldn't be more than five minutes. Okay?"

"Okay." I got behind the wheel again and settled down to wait, envisioning the sequence of events which would now be initiated by Dixie. She would walk through the wide entrance of Harding's Jewelry Store, casually pushing the baby in the stroller ahead of her. She would approach a counter and engage a sales clerk in conversation while the baby, no doubt, put sticky fingerprints from the candy all over the glass front of the nearest display case. Dixie, acting the prosperous young matron with a passion for jewelry, would evince interest in the Special of the Week advertised in yesterday's newspaper—the inch-wide bracelet of gold paved with square-cut emeralds and diamonds, and specially priced, for this week only, at $22,000.

The clerk would produce this bauble for Dixie's inspection. And Dixie, falling hopelessly in love at first sight with the beautiful bracelet, would then diffidently inquire of the clerk if she might

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take the bracelet to the front door of the shop and inspect it in the daylight while the clerk kept an eye on her baby. The clerk would readily assent to this; for what mother could possibly be suspected of a larcenous motive when she left her baby with the clerk as a hostage? Whereupon Dixie would step out to the sidewalk with Harding's Special of the Week in hand and walk straight around the corner to where I and her getaway car awaited her.

At this point I glanced toward the corner in question and saw Dixie come sprinting around it, the materialization of my thoughts. I noted with approval that she possessed a pretty turn of speed. I flipped open the station-wagon door and she charged in beside me, panting.

"Go!" she exhorted me.

Like a racehorse from the starting gate, I traversed the alley to the next street and turned into the stream of hurrying traffic. Meanwhile, Dixie was tearing off her wig, headscarf, and sunglasses and tucking them away out of sight beneath her seat.

Only when we were well away from the neighborhood of Harding's Jewelry Store did I turn to my still breathless companion and ask comfortably, "Where is it? Let's have a look at the Special of the Week."

She wiped perspiration from her upper lip. "I didn't get it."

"What!"

"I didn't get it, Professor." She sounded truly contrite. "I didn't even get a chance to see it."

My heart sank. Despite my trepidation, however, I remembered out of long habit to keep the station wagon moving briskly. "What went wrong?" I asked Dixie.

"A woman clerk came to wait on me. And the minute she saw the kid in the stroller she yelled, 'Where'd you get that baby? It isn't yours!' "

"How could she possibly know that?"

"Because it was hers," Dixie said.

"Q"

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a *NEW* detective story by

BETTY BUCHANAN

A private-eye parody-pastiche by the "editor of the Hollywood end" of "Daytime TV"—and if we can trust the internal evidence, the author knows her daytime TV, her Hollywood, her parody-pastiches, and her private eyes. A spiffy spoof. . .

GEE WHIZ, MY LOVELY

by BETTY BUCHANAN

I'd been hired by a Mr. Smith to find Mrs. Smith. He didn't want her back, but he was anxious to talk over divorce proceedings with her in order to establish another, and undoubtedly younger and prettier, Mrs. Smith. I'd found her staying at the Studio Club in Hollywood, and Smith and I met there in the early evening. I talked her into conferring with him in the library, then I went back to the lobby, slumped on a sofa left over from the comfortable old Mission Style era, and listened to the voices of the guests and visitors with my eyes closed. Suddenly someone said, "You're a private eye, huh?"

I looked up at a very tall, very pretty girl. She was wearing a dark green velvet suit that matched her eyes and voice, and her beautiful face was a blank waiting for an expression to light on it like a butterfly. "I said you're a private eye, huh?" she repeated. I nodded. She sat down next to me and the sensation was a little like having the Statue of Liberty join you in a rowboat. "I heard you talking to those two people." She nodded a head of red-gold hair toward the library entrance. "I want you to find Harvey for me. That's what private cops do, isn't it? Find people?"

"Look," I said. "I've had a day like a mudslide. Our little friend in there has been moving all over town, and I've been tagging along in a car with no third gear and a slow leak."

"I said I want you to find Harvey," she repeated, and this time I

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saw a blank, calm lioness look in her eyes. I hesitated and she dug her nails into my upper arm as she grabbed me and pulled me to my feet as if I was made of stuffed cotton.

"Wait a minute, sister," I began, and then, realizing that people in the lobby were beginning to glance at us with more than passing interest, I added, "Okay, okay, we'll find him, but let's get out of here. You don't want me to blow the Smith job, do you?" She relaxed her grip and we went out and stood on the low steps in front of the building. "Now, what's the story?" I said, pretending that I really wanted to hear it, but plotting to weave out and get away fast, provided my car started before she snaked me out with that wiry arm.

"It's funny seeing you," she said.

"Ha, ha—it's funny seeing you, too," I said. And I meant it.

"I mean you're a private cop. You're funny for a private cop."

"Yeah, sometimes I just sit in the office and have a good laugh about it."

"Do you know about me?" she asked suddenly.

I didn't say yes I know about you—you're a gorgeous nut in a town famous for its gorgeous nuts. And you're in Hollywood because it's the end of the line for you, and you want me to help you to believe that it isn't. I didn't say it; there was something sad and fierce and compelling about her. In other words, she scared me.

"Look," she said again, "I only want you to find Harvey."

"Who's Harvey? A dog?" Again I got the fingernails in the arm which was beginning to feel like pulled taffy.

"Harvey loved me," she said. "You can see I've been away? Sometimes it shows."

"Away?" Yeah, I got it. Away.

"Harvey said it would be best, and that after things were all right we could be like we were before. He was the darlingest-looking fella you ever saw."

"Do the cops know where you are?" I asked.

"Cops? No, the cops don't want me." Her eyes narrowed and I could see that her dime-sized brain was working. "All I had to do was walk out of the place. They always said it was voluntary. Harvey told them when I went in that it was voluntary. On account of I didn't do anything."

"What didn't you do?"

She got cagey. "You find Harvey and he'll explain it. You

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hear?" She tweaked my arm to drive home the point.

"Listen, you dopey girl," I said, trying to unlock myself from her, "you haven't even told me his last name. Or yours. Do you remember them?"

"Think I'm dumb or something? Hamilton. Harvey Hamilton. He's a darling guy. Cute as tap shoes." She slapped something into my hand. I looked, and found I was holding one hundred dollars in tens. I looked up and she was gone. I went back into the Club and asked about the tall girl in green velvet.

"I don't know," the woman at the switchboard said. "She came in right after you did. She's not a resident."

So I had $100. Maybe I could save it toward a real office instead of the old place in the D. W. Griffith Building on Cahuenga. I decided not to hang around and see how the Smiths made out. After all, I had contracted to find Mrs. Smith, not to talk her into lying down and rolling over.

I went around the corner, got into the old Oldsmobile, and drove up to the office on Cahuenga. The people in the other offices had gone home. I sat down, put my feet up, and wished that George from the Brown Derby would walk in with a bottle of cold champagne on a silver tray. Cold champagne.

I was about to drift off when a noise brought me out of the reverie. Ah, well, it probably would have been California champagne, anyway.

"I said I would like to speak to you." My eyes went back into focus and I saw that a young man was standing in front of my desk. To say he was good-looking would be to say that a combination of Buddy Rogers, Joel McCrea, and Cary Grant in their primes would have been passable. He must have made hundreds of women happy every day—all they had to do was look at him.

"Hey," I said on an impulse, "your name isn't Harvey, by any chance?"

"No, it isn't," he said. "Why?"

"No reason. I was just remembering something I'd rather forget. If you've come about the rent, I've got it right here, but I warn you I'm thinking about a classier place up on the Boulevard."

"Rent? No, I need the help of a private detective."

"Who told you about me?"

"Nobody. I saw your name on the alphabetical listing in the lobby. It sounded familiar, and I thought that was a good omen. But you're not what I expected to see, if I may speak frankly."

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"Do. I'm never what people expect to see. Especially me when I look into the mirror in the morning."

"How much would you charge to come to a night club with me where I have to meet and do business with some people?"

"What business? What people?"

"A delivery. It's legal, at least on my side. But I'd like certain arrangements to be made beforehand, and I'm not sure that I'm capable of making them. And I sure as hell can't be *seen* making them. Understand?"

"Sure—I go to a strange night club to do something I'm not told about with a guy who isn't named Harvey. That about it?" He laughed, but didn't reply. "We meet your buddies and I leave alone. The cops follow me down Sunset to Westwood Boulevard and pull me over while your buddies exit by the front door with the heroin."

"What *are* you talking about?" He laughed again, and said, "My name is Roy Leiniger, and it isn't heroin, it's diamonds." He reached into an inside pocket and then held out his hand. The stones cascaded onto the desk like cold champagne and the multi-colored glints leaped off them like the dancing lights of a summer sea.

"Someday, Roy," I said, "when I'm really rich, I'm going to have my own office on Hollywood Boulevard and I'm going to eat those things for breakfast." He picked up the clasp, held it above the desk, and the diamonds fell into a chain. It was the longest diamond necklace I'd ever seen. "Gee, I wish you were Harvey," I sighed.

"What is this Harvey business?" he said, scooping up the necklace and stuffing it back into his pocket.

"Nothing. It's just something I say every once in a while like twenty-three skidoo or so's your Aunt Emma."

"I see," he said politely.

"I ask for one hundred dollars as retainer and twenty-five dollars a day," I said. "The reason I'm more expensive than the others is that I've got so much to live up to."

He put the money down and the old desk immediately looked as if it had been refinished.

He explained what he wanted. We were to meet the next night at The Performers Club at the end of the Sunset Strip. I was to join him at a table with two other people and witness his giving the diamonds to them. And, oh, yes, I was to arrange to get a pic-

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ture of this. Simple. Simple as arranging for the Warner Brothers Golddiggers chorus line to infiltrate the steam room at Twentieth Century-Fox.

I showed up the next night looking fairly presentable. Roy looked like his same old drab combination of Buddy Rogers-Joel McCrea-Cary Grant. "You look fairly presentable," he said condescendingly. Well—The Performers was a classy joint and had been since the days the patrons drank gin out of coffee cups. It was run by a retired movie star who liked things to look a little on the Cecil B. DeMille side.

Inside the place was like New Year's Eve on the *Ile de France,* minus the paper hats. We sat down at a table near the band and were joined in a few minutes by two slightly overweight men in tight dinner jackets and slightly too-short pants. Roy slapped his breast pocket and the two men turned pale and jumped like drumsticks on a tight drumhead. "Gee," said one, "I thought you were going to reach right into your pocket and bring them out."

"I am," said Roy. "Be prepared." He glanced at me and I gave him a subtle nod. He pulled out a package, and just as it changed hands, the drummer in the band behind us fired off a series of rim shots, the wandering camera girl flashed, the waiter at the next table dropped a tray of glasses, and the owner of The Performers Club pulled up a chair, sat down, and said, "Hiya, Phil." Immediately after all that the floor show started with a line of chorus girls in ostrich plumes. Perfect!

Gee whiz! I said to myself, you are one good private eye. You deserve a nice office on the Boulevard. The two men had been startled for a moment, but now they settled back. Roy had a look in his eye that said maybe I could have another $25. Then the two men got up and said goodbye. "What did you say your name was?" one of them asked me.

"I didn't say," I said. "What did you say yours was?"

"The same," he said. They left.

"Whew!" Roy said, "I didn't think you could work it. When can we get a print?"

"Pretty soon. They've got a developing and printing room in the back. So do you mind telling me what we just did?" He looked pointedly at mine host, the ex-movie star, who said, "Seeya later, Phil," and left. He meant it, too, because I had to pay for those glasses out of my per diem.

"I'd rather not explain, but I'll tell you this: those diamonds

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were mine. Before we were married I gave them to my wife-to-be. She's a very rich woman. I was not rich at all, but the diamonds, which I happened to inherit, impressed her very much. I arranged to have them traded for enough credit to make some very wise investments. When I had made a great deal of money, I bought them back. My wife, who had been told they were stolen, was thrilled when they were apparently found by the police and returned. Unfortunately, those men—"

"The cops—" I said.

"They'll soon be ex-cops. They have just blackmailed them back. Or rather, they think they have. You see, it is essential that my wife believes me to be the man she thinks I am."

"Why the picture?"

"It's always best to have a record of these things. It helps in planning the next move, which is to get them back without publicity and without getting shot at on the steps of The Performers Club. Or anywhere else."

"But where did the diamonds come from to begin with?" I asked.

"You're being paid not to ask that question," he said, sounding as cold as a creditor. "Maybe I'll call you up and let you know when those cops have become ex-cops." He smiled a quick, insincere smile, and he didn't look like Buddy-Joel-Cary any more. "Let's go get that picture."

We went back to the dressing-room corridor and found a cubbyhole where a girl was bending over a table, with her back to us, looking at some eight-by-ten prints. She was a very tall girl and she was wearing the chorus ostrich plumes. She turned as we entered.

"Hello, Harvey," she said. "I knew you'd show up sooner or later. Now can I have my diamonds?"

"*Your* diamonds!" I exclaimed.

"The ones I loaned to Harvey, like I kept telling them at the funny farm. Things are okay now, Harvey, huh?"

He looked like a man who had just lost his last nickel in a pay phone. "They're okay," he said.

"You did good, eh, Harve? So where are the diamonds?"

"I'd advise you to get back to your chorus line," he said. "And if you bother me again, I'll have you put away. And this time it'll be for keeps." He turned to go, but he wasn't fast enough. She had reached into her purse which lay open on the table and pulled out

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a small gun. She squeezed the trigger before he'd got to the door. He fell at our feet and lay still.

"So that's Harvey," I said. "He was some looker."

"Where are the diamonds?" she said. "They're mine. This nice old guy I was married to gave them to me. He died. He fell out of a window in this terrible accident just about the time I met Harvey."

"I'll bet he fell out of that window *after* you met Harvey," I said. "And some cops outside have your diamonds."

"Cops?" she said.

"I decided not to take any chances. I got my cops to come and meet his cops."

"You're some smart private eye. Why were you suspicious of Harvey?"

"I figured out why I was hired. He thought I was stupid. Lots of people take one look at me and decide that. Sometimes I count on it. If there was going to be any shooting later on, I figure I was the one who was going to be found with a gun and two dead empty-handed cops. Something like that. Why else would a guy hire somebody he thought was a dumb inexperienced private eye? But what are you doing in here?"

"I'm interested in photography," she said. She reached into her purse again and pulled out another $100.

"Thanks," I said. I could see it already—the keen little office on Hollywood Boulevard, maybe in the bank building. With a frosted glass door and black and gold letters that spelled out my name: PHILIPPA MARLOWE, Private Investigator.

Gee whiz—Daddy would have been so proud!

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

Welcome home! Florence V. Mayberry, we've missed you—missed your stories of love and tragedy, your studies of women pushed to the limit of their emotional endurance, pushed to explosive climax . . . A thought has just occurred to us for the first time. There is a strange affinity between the Mayberry stories and many of the Cornell Woolrich short stories: both have the same kind of heart-throbbing suspense, the same emotional buildup, the same pyramiding of intensity—and yet the Mayberry and Woolrich stories are so different! . . .

NO TOMORROWS

by *FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY*

Hold my hand, Jimmy. Tight. So I'll know you're still here. Don't leave me, even if I ask you to. The way I did before.

Where is this room? It's strange, I don't remember this room. When did we come here? I must have fallen asleep as we came. Where are we, Jimmy? See, over there, that woman in white, she looks like a nurse. Is she a nurse? Jimmy, come close, I want to whisper: are we in a hospital, are we dying? Hank and you and I, are we dying . . .

Listen! That's my name. Someone is saying my name, over and over, soft and muffled—Laurel, Laurel.

Come closer, Jimmy. Yes, like that, your cheek on my hand, close. All those years we were apart—we have to make up for those lost years. It wasn't your fault, I know that, it was mine. But Hank needed me, so much. Jimmy, I want to explain how it was, everything about it so you'll understand what happened. No, don't cover my lips with your hand, I have to explain. Everything.

Remember that first night we met? At my engagement party? Mine and Hank's. Such a lovely, lovely night and I was so happy,

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laughing, singing along with the dance music. Hank didn't act happy, he was in one of his lonely moods. That's what it seemed to me then. It was only later I learned it was Hank himself, not moods, just himself. A built-in brooding for what he once had, or thought he had, and didn't have any more.

Today never belonged to Hank. No tomorrows either. Only yesterdays. For a while I believed Hank truly wanted the lost people, places, and moments he yearned about. I tried to help him find them after we were married. But he never could. They didn't stay yesterday when he found them, they became today. And he never wanted today.

That night of the engagement party you were playing the piano with the college combo, remember? I hadn't met you before and that was odd because you were a big man on campus and Hank's fraternity brother besides. But I hadn't. Your face had such a smiling look, like a light in it somehow, and I felt I had to tell you how great your piano playing was, how really great. I dragged Hank over to tell you so, Hank saying why bother, he could tell you any time. But I had to tell you myself. So Hank introduced us. The next number you asked the trumpet player to carry the lead in your place and you danced with me.

Hank had been remote and brooding ever since I had promised to marry him. Not eager to see me, the way he was when we were only dating. But that night as you whirled me into a second dance—you know?—Hank became lonely for me all over again. He followed us around the floor on the sidelines, then grabbed me as soon as the music stopped.

I remember how pleased I was, to have two tall good-looking men eager to dance with me. But whatever was aroused in Hank didn't last long. Only a few days later, with the wedding scheduled for the end of the term when Hank was graduated from the U, he started mooning over a wonderful girl he used to know in some long-lost hometown. He had a lot of long-lost hometowns with long-lost people in them. He had been moved around a lot as a child—his dad had a big construction company and moved with his jobs, taking Hank and Hank's mother along with him. Maybe that was the start of Hank's loneliness, who knows?

I took off my engagement ring and told Hank to go find that girl. So he became lonely for me all over again. He said it would break his heart if I wouldn't marry him, that he desperately needed my help, couldn't handle his moods alone; he even cried.

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So what could I do? Put his ring back on. To me, he was like a big lost child I could help to find himself—a lover and child all in one.

Besides—maybe you've forgotten, but I was a third-year major then in psychology—Hank fascinated me. My very own case history to practise on.

Strange trio, weren't we? Musician, athlete—the only time Hank seemed really happy was with a baseball in his hand—and a dabbler in how minds work. Because that's what we became just before Hank and I were married, a trio. Hank did the brooding, while you and I did the talking and laughing.

Jimmy, someone is crying, I hear someone crying—sad crying. They cried the night of our wedding too. But not sad. Happy crying, like weddings always have. Everything was so pretty, pink and white, the bridesmaids, flowers. A tall wedding cake with a bride and groom on top. All my sorority sisters and Hank's fraternity brothers there. My mother and Hank's father. My mother was still too angry at my father to have him come, because of their divorce. And Hank's mother was dead.

Everything so pretty. I was pretty too, everyone said so. But then, brides are always pretty.

After the bride danced with her groom, I danced with you. You put your face close to mine and whispered, "Be happy, little Laurel." I whispered back, "I'll try to make it forever."

Later Hank and I, with everyone following, walked down the pathway from the sorority house to the maple-lined street, the leaves of the trees whispering secret promises. When we reached Hank's new car, a wedding present from his father, I turned to tell everyone goodbye. And there you were, so close I bumped into you. "Sweet Laurel," you said. And you kissed me. It was all right for you to kiss me, everyone kissed the bride.

But you should have done it before. On my wedding night it was too late.

Hank tried to laugh, but his voice had a sharp edge, "Hey, knock it off, Jim. Remember, I'm the groom."

Your face raised. I stepped quickly into the car and waved goodbye. Who can see a hand tremble when it's waving?

It wasn't long before Hank was lonely again—only a few weeks after the wedding. Not lonely for me. I can't remember who it was, doesn't matter now. Then, yes, it did. I found Hank crying, sitting on our living-room floor, his face buried in the pillows of our sofa. I thought something dreadful had happened—a phone

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call or telegram I didn't know about, something wrong with his father.

I knelt beside him and put my arms around him. He jerked away, wouldn't talk. Finally he said our marriage was a mistake, that he couldn't forget whoever it was he was lonely for. I never knew her, and later I wondered if even Hank did, or if he was lonely for someone he dreamed up.

Oh, well, we came through that crisis. At first I said I would leave, and got out my suitcases. Then he begged me to stay. You see, he always wanted whatever he was losing. As for me, I hated divorce. I always hated my parents' divorce.

That scene, or something like it, was repeated many times before I saw you again. After the wedding you dropped out of our lives except for the occasional postcard. You were busy, I know that, struggling to break into bigtime music. And maybe you just didn't want to see us for a while.

Hank and I were still at the university, both of us carrying classes. Hank was working on an M.A.—he thought he might become a coach. Not working very hard though. He didn't need money. His mother had left him a trust fund and his father was always sending us gifts, mostly money.

It was two years after the wedding when you came back to our university town—came for the class reunion, yours and Hank's. You arrived on its final night, the night of the formal dance. I happened to be looking at the ballroom entrance and suddenly there you were, scanning the dancers as though searching for someone. The orchestra leader recognized you, called on the crowd to give you a big hand, and insisted you lead the next number. That wasn't just because you used to lead the campus combo. By that time you'd been on network TV, playing piano with a name band, and had a song out that disc jockeys were playing.

Halfway through the number you saw me sitting on the sidelines waiting for Hank. You handed the baton over to the leader, came straight to me, took my shoulders, and smiled. Close to, I was shocked to see how strained and thin you were, with dark circles under your eyes. I suppose getting a foothold in the music game hadn't been easy. Or perhaps . . . oh, well, whatever it was. You said, "Laurel, this is what I've been looking forward to." You kept holding me, looking at me.

Finally you dropped your hands and asked, "Where's old Hank?"

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"Around," I said. My voice sounded squeaky, tight. "Somewhere around." And added, "He'll want to see you."

I knew he wouldn't. Hank had stopped being lonely for people. Except for himself. Sounds queer, but it was true. Just lonely for himself, as though he had lost whatever he was and was going around empty. It hadn't been easy getting him to that reunion dance. He didn't want to see people.

"Let's dance," you said. "Bring back old times." You took me in your arms and we glided around the floor. I tried to say something, anything, but the first word caught in my throat. "Hush," you whispered. "Dreams don't need sound."

We drifted off the dance floor onto the veranda, into the fragrant softness of the Indiana spring night. You took my hand and we walked across the lawn, onto the path under the big maple trees.

At last you said, "Maybe you've guessed. That I fell in love with you that first night we met. Told myself, that's the girl I have to marry. Only I didn't. But the way I felt then has never changed. Apparently I'm a dumb kind of guy who falls in love once. Just once. Dumb because I realize I can't have you. But I wanted you to know."

We walked along without speaking, the soft scuffing of our shoes on the path the only sound. Then, as though a signal had been given, we turned to each other and I put my arms around your neck and held up my face to be kissed.

You said, "Let's find Hank. Tell him. Now."

I gave you my hand again and we turned back across the lawn, back to the veranda, moving fast in rhythm with the hard-rock beat that the orchestra was pounding out, *hurry, hurry, hurry . . .*

Jimmy, don't take your hand away, please! Keep holding it tight just as you did that night.

Hank wasn't on the dance floor. Not in the lounge. Not in the hall, or the upstairs lounge. We searched so long I had too much time to think, to worry that Hank might get lonely for me all over again.

We finally found him in the upstairs men's room, sick—he was drinking too much by then. We had to clean him up before we could help him down the back stairs, staggering between us, out through the kitchen and the back door. Outside in the fresh air Hank reared straight and yanked free. "Wha' you tryin' do, you'n this good-for-nothin' li'l—"

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You slapped him on the mouth, flat, as dispassionately as an adult might slap a foul-mouthed adolescent. Which, I suppose, Hank really was. He began to cry.

"All right, Hank, I'm sorry," you said. "But keep your mouth shut and keep walking. You need to sleep this off."

"Good ol' Jim, missed you, boy, missed you." He leaned on you, blubbering, and we stumbled to our car. When we reached our house you half carried Hank inside, stretched him across his bed. I put a coverlet over him and we left him.

Back in the living room we faced each other, not touching, just looking at each other. I said, "I can't leave him."

I didn't explain why. That Hank was like a child. That what does one do with children? Well, you look after them. Good or bad. You don't tear them to bits with a divorce. As my parents had done with me.

"Are you sure, Laurel?"

I nodded.

"I'm not," you said. "Let me tell him. When he's sober. If tonight is a sample, this kind of life is misery, for him as well as you. And beyond that, you belong to me, Laurel, because I know now you feel the same about us as I do."

I began to cry, shaking my head back and forth. You took me in your arms and said, "Okay, don't cry, don't cry. But I'm waiting for you. Because sometime, somehow, you'll be mine."

The next day you left.

You waited three years to come back—so long that I began to think you had forgotten or had found out I wasn't the only one for you. That was the hard part, to fear you had changed your mind, because by then I was ready to go with you.

During those three years I pretended Hank really was my child, that I must take care of him no matter what. That helped. A mother can be angry at a child, but not in the same way as a woman can be angry at a man. When Hank was drunk and struck me—well, when a little child strikes his mother, the mother catches his hand, tells him that was naughty. She doesn't run away, leave him. When a child has a tantrum because a toy is lost or broken, the mother doesn't say goodbye forever. It wasn't easy to humor Hank out of his moods, to pet him, to cater to him. He was the only child I had. *Straighten up, Hank, I would tell him, you're acting like a baby, get a job. It isn't good for a man not to work. You used to be an athlete, try to get on the coaching staff*

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at the U. You'll be happier with a job.

But he never really tried. He had plenty of money, so why bother, he said. A big slob of a 180-pound kid who needed constant care.

Jimmy, when you finally came back I was worn out, sick to death of baby-sitting a grown man. Those three years had seemed like thirty and I knew I couldn't endure even another month. Not even another day. I had to leave now.

Was it yesterday or today when you came back? I can't seem to remember. But I remember what you said. That I must leave now with you. And I kept saying *yes, yes, yes* over and over, that I loved you and was afraid you were never coming to take me away.

Neither of us heard Hank come in. Suddenly he was there between us, screaming, lunging with his fists. I ran between you, tried to hold his arms, tried to tell him we couldn't go on like a mother and child. He kept yelling, hitting at us. I suppose he wasn't to blame after what he heard us say, but he was so violent—ranting, crying, threatening.

The angry sounds beat against my ears. My head became a massive throbbing ache and I ran from the living room, down the hall, to escape. But the sounds followed, pound, pound, like hammer blows.

That's why I thought of it, Jimmy. I'm sure that's why I thought of it—the noise hammered at me, wouldn't stop. So I went looking for it. The hammer. I found it in the kitchen, beneath the sink.

I hid it behind my back and returned to the living room. I raised it. Hank grabbed my arm but I twisted free, spun out of reach. My head floated away, separated from me, became free of what my body did. Everything blurred, Hank, you, everything. But an arm reached through the blur and I swung the hammer. The hammer struck and I seemed to be falling, falling . . .

What happened next, Jimmy? I can't remember, why can't I remember? Jimmy, I'm afraid. Look, I'm shivering. Did something terrible happen, did I . . .

Jimmy, help me remember! I felt the hammer hit him! Is Hank dead? Tell me, Jimmy, did I kill him, did I kill him?

"Oh, God, now she's screaming," whispered the nurse to a second nurse who had joined her. "She's yakkety-yakked to that poor

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guy ever since she regained consciousness, and now she's screaming. No, we can't give her a hypo, not with concussion."

"Why did they bring her here? There's no psycho ward in this hospital," said the other nurse.

"County hospital's full up, no private rooms available. And there's no hospital in our dinky jail."

"Jail? You mean, she's in custody?"

"Why do you think that cop's at the door? Didn't you see him when you came in?"

"Sure, that's why I ducked in here, to find out why. What did she do? She doesn't look the type to *do* anything, I mean anything criminal."

"Yeah, sure, she's real refined. Just murdered a guy, that's all. Bashed in his head with a hammer. Hit him so hard she fell and struck her head on something hard. I heard about it when I was down in reception to help bring her up."

"Who's the man with her?"

"Husband," said the first nurse. "He's the Hank she's asking did she kill him. Saw him sign her in. Henry Summerfield, husband. But she's flipped. She thinks she's talking to the other one, the man downstairs in the morgue."

"Q"

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a *NEW* detective story by

ERNEST SAVAGE

San Francisco detective Sam Train was on his annual fishing vacation and wasn't about to get mixed up in business—no, sir. He was "in high country and hard country, but they're getting closer every year—the migrant vandals, the destroyers, the random killers who will burn your house or shoot you or smash your face on sheer impulse." But trouble was Sam Train's stock in trade, and there's an old saying: once a cop, always a cop. It's in the blood. . .

COUNT ME OUT

by *ERNEST SAVAGE*

You get up to Bucky Hagen's place on a footpath that follows the ridge for a quarter mile and then angles through the trees to his cabin. You can't drive there, except on a motorcycle. He parks his Chevy pickup in a little open space alongside the ridge where the rutted road ends. And then he walks up, unless he brings that old Harley-Davidson of his, in which case he rides. It's a better walk than it is a ride, but Bucky, since his wife died and he's gone to hell, mostly rides. Bucky's 62, quite a bit older than I am, so maybe I shouldn't criticize.

His Chevy was parked in the open space and I figured he was there, so I went on up. Walking. It was about 2:30 in the afternoon of a cool spring day. Tomorrow morning at dawn the fishing season would open up here in the mountains and for the past ten years Bucky and I have faced that auspicious moment together. We don't do anything else together—he lives in Stockton, I in San Francisco—but we do that, and it's a seasoned tradition we both like and it has the strength of tradition.

Bucky's cabin is situated on a slight rise of otherwise level land in a grove of giant pines almost park-like in their spacing. Before

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his wife Betsy died, she spent patient loving years clearing the undergrowth from between the trees, and Bucky's place is about as pretty as you're going to find. Or was, anyway, before she went Now it's lapsing back to seed, just as he is. Last year he was drunk most of the three days we spent together fishing the Upper Eagle, and you just don't get drunk in places like that.

The Upper Eagle is a series of deep swirling pools strung like jewels between stretches of white water that falls sometimes one foot or two and sometimes 20 feet in a straight drop. It pounds down out of the High Sierra in a gorge of rocks and boulders and shelves of stone worn smooth and bleached white by eons of wind, water, and sun. It's a beautiful river, but it takes all a man's strength and cunning to stay alive on. It has fish in it that have been there forever and will never get caught and will never die. I know some of them and I've given them names which I call out when I fish their special pools. It's the kind of river that will do that sort of thing to a grown man. And it has gold in it too.

Last year on our last afternoon together, Bucky fell in the river and almost drowned and I lost a good rod and reel pulling him out. I told him then I'd never fish with him again when he was drunk and I was coming up now to remind him of that.

The Harley-Davidson was in the woodshed to the left of the cabin. Smoke was coiling lazily out of the stone chimney to the right. I stopped about 40 feet from the place and felt the warmth of anger build behind my eyes. I tried to stop it, to calm myself. I come up here for two weeks every spring to get away from all that—the angering things, human cussedness, sloth, indifference, evil. The thick mat of pine needles on his cabin roof is what turned the heat on behind my eyes—that, and the busted spark arrester on his chimney top.

Normally at this time of year there's still a good snow pack on the ground and rooftops, but this year there wasn't, and that combination of dry pine needles and unscreened chimney stack was dynamite. Fire warnings were posted all over the mountains and Bucky should have known better. I walked up to his door and knocked.

A woman opened it—a girl, about twenty-looking. She surprised me.

"Where's Bucky?" I said.

"Him and Milt went over to the river," she said. She stood hip-shot against the door frame, dark sullen eyes on mine.

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"Who's Milt?" I said.

"Who're you?"

I took a deep breath. "My name's Sam Train," I said evenly. "I'm a friend of Bucky's. My cabin's down slope a bit. When's he due back?"

"He di'n't say." She wore a loose red halter and short denim pants over solid hips and thighs. Her feet were bare and dirty and she smelled. She couldn't have gotten into the tackiest beer joint in California, but she could get into Bucky's and I thought, sadly, hell, he's slipped another notch since last year, maybe all the way this time. She was the kind of female I want no part of.

"Well, look," I said civilly, "when he gets back tell him to clean off his roof and fix that spark arrester on his chimney stack." She looked blank, so I said, "Come on out and I'll show you."

"Up yours," she said tonelessly.

I almost reached through the door to grab her and drag her out, but didn't. The heat flared and died behind my eyes. I didn't need this and I didn't need Bucky any more. But this year the fire hazard was too critical to be careless with. "Tell him," I said. "Or the Forestry Service will."

I'd left San Francisco before nine that morning and arrived at my cabin around noon. I turn in off the ridge road a little before Bucky's parking area and can drive the Dart almost to my cabin before the tall trees block me off. The first thing I do each year is check the place for damage and then rake the roof clean, unless it's under snow. So far I've never found damage, but it's a thing you keep your fingers crossed against. This is high country and hard country, but they're getting closer every year—the migrant vandals, the destroyers, the random killers who will burn your home or shoot you or smash your face on sheer impulse.

After I got back from Bucky's I made a list of what I'd need for the two weeks I planned to stay and went down to Mountain City to get it. That chore usually pleases me, but this year it didn't. I kept thinking of Bucky's roof and spark arrester and of Bucky himself. We'd fished and panned for gold through a long stretch of years, nearly a quarter of my life, and it was over now. Bucky hadn't come back from the grievous blow of Betsy's death, and never would.

Last year, after he'd cost me a rod and reel, he'd quit fishing and taken up his perennial hunt for gold—partly if not mostly in the taverns of Mountain City where stories of strikes and lost

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mines and abandoned claims are as rife as they ever were. Down through the years I've panned about $1500 worth of dust and flakes (at today's prices) from the Upper Eagle and its headwaters, and so has Bucky. And somewhere up there are the veins from which it comes, the mother lode, and men will go on searching for it until it's found or the world ends. But it will not be found by a drunk, I thought, whose secret search is for the soothing grave.

I felt sorry for Bucky, but I did not want him, in the carelessness of his decline, to set fire to my mountain, so on the way back I stopped at the Division of Forestry office. I told the ranger on duty that he should send a man up to Hagen's place and make him shape up, and he said he would first thing in the morning. I could have gone back and talked to Bucky myself—and the ranger's eyes told me that—but it was their job, not mine. I'm on vacation. For 19 years I was a cop on the S.F. Force and for the three years since I've been a P.I.

The next morning I got up at four o'clock and drove down through Mountain City and cross country from there to the north fork of the Feather River. I'd decided Bucky and his friends could have the Upper Eagle for a day or two. Besides, I was fond of the Feather. It's more leisurely and less violent and dangerous than the Eagle and it's a good place to get your legs in shape after the winter's layoff. You fish all Sierra streams from rock to rock and halfway through that first day, sometimes, you wish you were home in bed.

I had good luck there as I usually do. By noon I'd caught my limit and after I ate my sandwich and drank the rest of my coffee I headed home. On the way back I heard over the car radio that a fire was underway north of the Upper Eagle and it gave me the same dark thrill that report always does. I hurried. I went through Mountain City at 3:15 and 20 minutes later was jouncing up the ridge road near the cabin. Just above my turnoff a dark-green Forestry pickup was parked, heading down.

I pulled over, got out, and walked up the road to Bucky's parking area where two more Forestry trucks, a Mountain County Sheriff's car, and a County ambulance were parked. One of the Forestry trucks, a flatbed, had a winch rig on the rear and a cable had been fed down over the lip of the ridge to something out of sight below. A half dozen uniformed men were standing there looking down. Standing by themselves at the point where Bucky's

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trail leads up slope were the girl I'd talked to yesterday and a big man.

The girl had on a sweater over the same red halter she'd worn yesterday and a pair of dirty sneakers on her feet. She looked at me without apparent recognition from 20 feet away, then whispered something to the man, and he looked at me with quick interest. He was heavily bearded and long-haired and powerful-looking. I returned his stare for a few seconds before walking over to the Deputy Sheriff I recognized and asking him what happened.

"Train!" he said and stuck out his hand. "Hagen's down there," he said, "and a ranger named Miller. They went over the edge in the ranger's truck sometime this morning. The man down below says they're both dead. When'd you get up?"

"Yesterday. I heard there was a fire, Arkins."

"Yeah, there was, but it's out now. North of the Eagle, a small one. One of the helicopters spotted the ranger's truck in the ravine on the way back from there."

"How'd it happen, d'you know? I mean Bucky."

"We got an idea. Miller came out this morning to get Hagen to clean his roof and fix his chimney and evidently they got in a fuss about it. Those people over there"—he gestured toward the girl and the bearded man—"say Miller arrested Hagen and started to take him to town. They said Hagen was drunk. Then, evidently, they had a fight in the truck and Hagen got shot and the truck went over the edge. We'll know more when they get the bodies up, but that could've been the way it went. Miller was a known hothead and you know Hagen, he hasn't been sober for two years."

"Who says Hagen got shot?"

"The man down below there. Miller's the only one at the local station who routinely carries a sidearm. He's quick, like I say, and we've had some trouble with him. Saturday nights he gets drunk too. I see you been fishing, Sam. Any luck?"

"Yeah, my limit. Over on the Feather."

"They tell me Teel Lake is loaded with steelhead."

"I'm not much of a lake man, Arkins. Did you get statements from those two over there?"

"Not yet. We'll take 'em down to town when we get the bodies up."

"Who are they?"

"Friends of Bucky's, they said. They said they met him a couple

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of weeks ago in Stockton and he invited 'em up for the summer."

"The *whole* summer?"

"That's what they said."

I looked over my shoulder at the girl and our eyes locked instantly, hers sullen and baleful now; maybe she smelled the cop in me. The man was looking at the winch truck, his hands in his hip pockets, flat white belly and hair-matted chest showing through the gap in one of those buttonless wool-lined vests that macho types sometimes wear. It was a bravura touch in the chilly afternoon air.

A radio crackled and the cable, snaking down the steep slope of the ravine, jumped and tightened. You could see the path the truck had smashed through the underbrush, but you couldn't see the truck. It was below a jutting shelf of rock a hundred feet down and it would be hard to get it back up past that shelf. Maybe they'd just bring up the bodies.

Arkins lit a cigarette and the flare of his match reminded me of a lot of things, chiefly that I had opened the curtain on this lethal show. But I said, "What started the fire, Arkins, do they know yet?"

"Probably one of these things," Arkins said, shaking out the match. "Probably some city dude cooking his breakfast this morning. Roughing it. No offense, Sam." He grinned at me amiably.

Last fall Arkins and I had had a brief encounter in the way of business and he had emerged from it with more egg on his face than I. But he was an easy-going, self-forgiving man, like most mountain men, and I liked him. "Somebody," I said, "has still got to clean off Bucky's roof and fix his chimney."

"Yeah," Arkins said.

"Maybe you can get Grizzly Barlow over there to do it," I said. "He's living there, I guess."

"Yeah, whyn't you ask him, Sam?"

"I asked somebody already," I said. "And besides I'm on vacation." I turned, walked back down to the Dart, and went home.

I usually sleep like a contented child in the cabin and that night was no exception, but when I wakened in the morning I felt for the first time the impact of Bucky's death and the first real lash of guilt.

It was nonsense. Bucky had wanted to die. For three years Bucky had been Death looking for a place to happen, so why should it trouble me? It was nonsense.

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I went outside and breathed the cold clean air. Where I go on the Upper Eagle is a long hard uphill hike and you don't take that first step without thinking about it. My legs still hurt from the workout yesterday on the Feather and I knew they would for a couple days yet. They needed more time before tackling the Eagle—more of the Feather maybe, or one of the little tributaries up above where I've found some gold. I was waffling. It had been a bad start for what has always been the most prized two weeks of my year, and there I was just standing there.

I ate breakfast and then got in the Dart and drove the four winding miles down to Mountain City. I'd lost two rooster-tail lures on the Feather yesterday and I wanted to replace them and get a fresh spool of 8-ounce line. Besides, there was a new Daiwa reel I'd heard about and I figured Mickey Johnson would have it in his store down there if anyone did. More waffling—

I was still in Johnson's at ten o'clock and had about 40 bucks worth of stuff lined up to buy when Arkins found me there.

"Saw your car outside, Sam," he said, "and figured you was here."

"So?" I had a particularly fancy new lure in my hand and didn't put it down.

"So how about coming over and identifying Bucky's body?"

"Why me, Arkins? Half the people up here knew him, including you."

"You know *I* can't do it, Sam. Besides, you knew him better than anyone else. Come on."

I didn't want to go. An hour in Johnson's store had reacquainted me with why I was here. "Count me out," I said doggedly. "Get somebody up from Stockton to do it."

"He had no family, Train, you know that."

"Then a neighbor, a friend. How about those hippie guests of his?"

"They're not there this morning. I just got back from there."

"Why didn't you get 'em to do it last night?" I said obstinately.

"We didn't get the bodies up until after dark and they'd gone by then. Come on, Sam, it'll take you ten minutes."

I dropped the lure back in its box and followed him out.

The shot had gone clean through Bucky's heart. Doc Zerbo, who handled autopsies for Mountain County, said death had been instantaneous. Bucky's body was laid out on an embalming table in the back room of Madison's Funeral Parlor on Main Street, down

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the block from Johnson's. Mountain City is about a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide and 90 percent of the permanent population of the county live there. They can't afford a lot of sophisticated forensic equipment and personnel. Dr. Edward Zerbo does their autopsies in Madison's back room, but he makes his living setting bones during the skiing season and curing snake bite the rest of the year. I'd met him once before and liked him. He said he'd rather be poor here than rich anywhere else, and I understand that.

"Well, it's Bucky," I said, and Arkins duly noted that down.

"The bullet I took out of him looks like a .38," Zerbo said, "and Miller's gun is a .38 and there's probably no doubt he shot him, but we'll have to send them down to Sacramento for a ballistics check."

"Sounds good," I said, and turned to go, but then turned back. Bucky's body was badly battered from the long fall down the slope of the ravine, but there was a motley pattern of marks on his legs that weren't bruises. Little red bumps.

"What're those?" I said to Zerbo, pointing, and he said probably ant bites made while he and Miller were dead in the ravine.

"Does Miller have any?" I said and Zerbo shrugged and pulled the sheet back from Miller's body on the next table. It was as badly battered as Bucky's, but there were no little red marks on his legs.

"What killed him?" I said.

"The fall," Zerbo said. "I haven't done him yet, but it looks like his neck's broken."

"The ants didn't like him, I guess." I'd seen something else on Bucky's body, but didn't mention it. There were marks around his shoulders that looked as if he'd worn a heavy backpack for a long time, and I knew Bucky didn't even own a backpack. It bothered me as it would have bothered me if I were working; but I wasn't working; I was on vacation now and I put it out of my mind.

"Good seeing you again, Doc," I said and left.

I drove up to Teel Lake that afternoon and rented a boat at the marina and caught three good-looking steelhead, but since they were only lip-hooked I threw them back. I don't like lake fishing. Everybody and his Aunt Maude from down below goes lake fishing, especially early in the season, and the surface of the lake that afternoon was as crowded as a supermarket parking lot on dollar day.

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The automotive age has produced a law in America as irrevocable as the table of tides: If you can't get to it on wheels, don't go to it. In ten years on the Upper Eagle I've seen no more than a half dozen men, counting Bucky, and that's what I like about it—that and its raw thundering beauty, and its danger. This was no vacation, it was a shopping trip on water. I was back at the cabin by six o'clock.

There's no power cable to the cabin and therefore no radio, TV, or electric lights. There's nothing much in it save a butane-powered cook top and refrigerator, a table, a few chairs, three bunks, and a half dozen books. But there is yourself, there's always yourself and what you've made of yourself in 45 quick years.

Why, I asked myself, did the bugs bite Bucky, but not bite Miller? I put aside the book I'd been trying to read under the cold light of a hissing mantle lantern, and let the question all the way in. It was a cop question, and once a cop, always a cop. Bucky had gotten himself bitten some place other than down in the ravine. So where, and why?

I got up, went outside, and listened to the world spin for a while. You can hear it up here and it's a good sound; the sound of Time.

The ground underfoot was springy with mulch, the massed and layered detritus of 10,000 years. This noble forest, these tall trees die as we die and are chewed to dust as we are chewed to dust by the million mandibled jaws of the small world. It's their work.

Tie a man to one of these trees, I thought, leave him there for a while and the big black ants will think he's just another job to do. Strap a man by his shoulders somehow— But why?

Dammit! I wanted no part of this. I turned and went back in the cabin and by midnight I finally got to sleep. Bucky was better off where he was anyway, I told myself.

There are two things you have in mind when you fish the Upper Eagle: the first is to stay alive, the second to catch a fish, assuming you've achieved the first. There's a point up there beyond which I've never gone and never will. It's where, for me, the river starts. It pours down between two giant boulders into a boiling pool 20 feet below, breaks there into several streams that gush through and over a ridge of rocks to a larger pool three or four feet lower down. The water is freshly melted snow and viciously cold and the thunder of it is awesome. I drop a line in that lower pool every year, but it's a gesture, a ritual. I don't think

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any fish could live in it, even if he were fool enough to want to.

Usually in spring the snow is still piled deep along the banks of the Eagle, but this year the pack had been light and there wasn't much there, just grainy patches in the shaded spots, still firm and dry at ten in the morning; but by noon, under the lash of the mountain sun, their substance too would join this cataract, this thundering rush of virgin water, this primitive force. It never seems possible to me that I am just hours away from my apartment on Van Ness in San Francisco, and always that first day I know both joy and fear, but mostly fear.

It is no place to be alone. With every step you're at risk and if you break a leg you stay forever. I wear work shoes up here with thick, cleated, composition soles. Uncleated soles, even of rubber or crepe, are no good. The water bounces and sprays up the sides of the sleek rocks and sometimes wets their tops and they can become like greased slides if you don't have the right kind of shoes on.

I wear heavy cord pants, a heavy wool shirt, and a brimmed hat that otherwise hangs on a peg in the cabin. I carry a canvas creel slung on a strap over my shoulder that lies flat against my side until I put something in it. I carry six lures in a flat plastic box in one button-down shirt pocket, a candy bar in the other, and a single rod and reel. You've got to have one hand free to help you from rock to rock and the fewer things you have dangling from your frame, the fewer chances there are to snag on something.

Moving around up there, I missed Bucky. We always had eye contact with each other and that's almost like having an extra hand.

I worked carefully down to the next lower pool and began some serious fishing. Pierre lived in that pool. Pierre is a trout and, as I said, he always has lived there and always will. I hooked him once two years ago and if I'd had a net I could have landed him. But I never carry a net because it's just one more thing that could get you in trouble; and besides, I didn't want to catch Pierre. He's King here, and I just visit.

I use a green and gold rooster tail as lure, one-eighth ounce in weight if the wind's up, one-sixteenth if the air is still. I drop the lure in the white water in the center of the stream and draw it across his domain, about a foot down and flashing all the way in the clear green pool. He always comes out and sniffs at it—at

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least once—and two years ago the hook snagged him on the underside of the lower lip and drew him to the edge where he wiggled free and swam away.

It must have embarrassed Pierre, for he didn't show up again all that season. He's about two feet long and there's a pattern of black dots on his mottled brown back that looks like a P. Downstream a way in another pool there's a similar trout with a pattern of dots on his back forming an H and his name is Harry. Up here you talk to the fish if you talk at all, even if a friend's in sight. Your voice carries about a yard through the fractured air and teaches you finally that most of what you say you needn't have.

Back home in San Francisco, sometimes, awake in bed, listening to the rumble and squeal of traffic, the beagle-bawl of ships in the Bay, the screams of muggers' victims, and other not entirely imaginary sounds, I wish I could capture the special thunder of the Eagle, as the roar of the sea is caught in a shell, and lay it on the pillow next to my head. It's a tiring man's whimsy; but I'd sleep better.

Pierre came out that morning and sniffed my lure three times before I bid him goodbye and moved on down to my next station, where Harry lives. I've never hooked Harry, but I usually take one or two of his smaller mates for eating. Their flesh is so hard and firm that it flakes like a cracker when cooked, and there's nothing quite so good. But I didn't take anything that day from Harry's pool, or from anywhere else. Not a fish, anyway.

My legs had been aching all morning and when the sun was straight overhead I sat down in one of my favorite spots and ate my candy bar. I was tired and I missed Bucky. I'd slipped a while back and gotten my right leg wet to the knee and knew suddenly just how alone I was. Bucky would have come a-running, drunk or sober.

A little above and to the right of where I sat on a ledge, 30 feet over the roiling stream below, a nameless creek came tumbling in through the trees and joined its waters with the Eagle. Bucky and I had taken gold higher up on that creek, and a little last year from the curling gravel bar it formed at its junction with the Eagle.

It was a spectacular vantage point, if a little scary. The natural ledge on which I sat tapered away to nothing on my left and was no more than two feet wide at any point as it curved back around

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the rock on my right to solid ground. Bucky wouldn't come out there and called me a damn fool when I did. But it was always worth it. If I were a bird I'd live on that ledge.

After I finished my candy bar and talked to my legs for a few moments, I stood up carefully and stretched—and saw them from the corner of my eye, Bucky's friends. Somehow I'd half expected to all morning.

And they saw me.

They were 40 feet below me on the south bank of the river, 150 feet away in a straight line. We looked at each other for a long time and then the girl said something to the man and the man reached into a canvas sack at his feet, pulled out a pistol and very deliberately, holding it in both hands, fired at me.

I didn't hear the shot in the roar of the river, but I saw the muzzle flash. He moved a little uphill and fired again, just as I flattened myself on the rock at my back. I heard the zip-hiss of that shot only inches away.

I looked again and he was running up the slope behind me. He had me trapped. If he knew where the ledge I was standing on started, he could walk out on it and shoot me at his pleasure. But he didn't know that. I took another quick peek and saw him clambering up a big domed rock to the right of mine. From its top he'd be 25 feet away and from there he could cover the point at which I'd have to emerge if I retreated around the ledge. But he didn't know that either.

I took another quick look and saw him now nearly on top of the domed rock, but unsure of his feet yet and he wasted a shot that I didn't even hear. I had seconds to do something before he reached the top of the dome and only one thing to do it with—my rod and reel. It was leaning against the rock behind me and it was still armed with the eighth-ounce rooster tail I'd been using in Harry's pool. It was going to have to be a very good cast—

I took another peek to estimate distance. The domed rock was steeper near the top than it looked and the man had on the wrong kind of shoes. His left leg was extended down the side of the rock, his right bent under him holding his weight. He aimed at me one-handed, but didn't fire. He was about 25 feet from me now on a slight uphill line. I wanted him standing.

I took the rod in my right hand and twisted on the ledge, 15 inches wide where I was, so that my face was now pressed against the stone. I took another quick look and saw another muzzle flash

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and heard the sharp slap of the bullet striking the rock above my head.

I was ready to go. I could hit him easily with the rooster tail, but that isn't what I wanted. I wanted to drop it over his shoulder or his head and have it go past him by no more than a foot, because a foot was about all I could pull it back without losing my footing on the ledge. I wanted *him* to fall into that murderous water below, not me.

I had to invite one more shot because I wanted him slightly off-balance from the recoil. I held the rod down, ready to whip it up and cast, then I stuck my head far enough around for him to see, raised the rod, and cast in one fluid move. I don't know where his shot went, but the rooster tail snagged in the long hair at the back of his head and when I pulled it back as far as I could before letting it go, he came part way with it. He whirled, his arms flying, his left shoe slipping again, and arced over backward. He tried to twist in mid-air, but didn't have the room and caught a rock full in the chest before bouncing in the water 30 feet below and out of sight.

I shut my eyes for a moment and pressed my cheek against the stone, warm in the afternoon sun. My knees felt as though they could bend either way and I didn't want to try them yet. When I opened my eyes again, the girl was jumping from the shore to a rock about a yard out in the water. There was a cluster of rocks there that in low water could take a sure-footed man halfway across the stream, but not now. The water there was all white and angry; but she didn't seem to see that, she saw her man slipping past, slipping away, his hairy face rolling up for an instant, then an arm, a leg; a broken man out there, dead or dying and lost forever.

She balanced for a moment on the first rock and then jumped for the next and I heard myself mouthing the words, "Go back, go back!" She slipped, seemed to sit in the air for a moment, then half stood again, turning and falling.

I could see nothing at first but her long black hair, then I could see her face, her mouth wide, her teeth flashing, her eyes on mine. She was clinging to a rock, both arms wrapped around it, her body trailing behind in the fierce grip of the boiling stream. Her dark eyes were riveted on mine and her mouth now was forming the words over and over, "Help me, help me!"

I sidled shakily around the ledge to solid ground and then down

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to where she'd started her short fruitless trip. She was 15 feet away, but her pleading eyes seemed closer than that.

I was unmoved. Somehow she and her man had harnessed Bucky to something outdoors, a tree probably, and left him there long enough for the ants to chew him up pretty good before, again somehow, killing him. And if that were so, they'd also killed the ranger.

"Please—oh, God help me, please!" I could almost hear her words in the thundering air.

I wanted to walk away right now and be done with it. She couldn't last another ten minutes in the grip of that frigid powerful stream. They'd killed Bucky and the ranger and then they'd tried to kill me because they thought I knew that; or—it occurred to me just then—because I saw them here, just here. Not somewhere else, but here.

I could walk away from her right now and sleep well tonight. And tomorrow night, and the next. But there is a difference in some of us, and some night—

The flickering spark we call soul is a sacred thing. If hers isn't, then mine is. She could walk away from me laughing; I knew that. But I'm not her. Not yet.

I didn't try to jump out on the rocks as she had. I stepped into the water just upstream of them and felt the breath snap shut in my throat. I moved toward her, belly deep, handing myself from rock to rock, my feet searching out the high spots on the stony bed of the stream. Her eyes were on me all the way until I caught her hands, and then they closed.

I pulled her over the rock she'd been clinging to, got her arms over my shoulders, and hauled her to shore and up the bank a few yards to where the sun burned warm. We were both exhausted and lay there for minutes before I got up and took off my shirt and spread it out to dry. I didn't touch her. She had on a shirt and sweater and those same denim shorts she'd worn before. The skin of her legs was still bluish-white from cold and they were both badly scratched from the rocks.

Her right leg was broken at mid-shin. It didn't go straight down, but bent there in a way that could make you sick if you let it. It didn't bother me at all.

A little later, when the cold wore off, it would begin to hurt again. It had probably hurt sharply when it happened, but then the cold had taken over. It meant that my option was still open;

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she would die here, too, if I left her, and the temptation was still strong. She opened her eyes and pulled hair away from her face the way women do, lightly, with the tips of the fingers. In any other woman it would have been a charming gesture.

I crouched down by her head on the springy brown earth. "You're gonna tell me how and why you killed Bucky," I said, "or I'm gonna leave you here for the ants. Do you understand me?"

She frowned groggily. "Bucky—?" It took her a while to pick up the thread—Bucky had been several fatal events back. "We have this rig," she said finally. "We hooked it on him and tied him to a tree."

"What rig?"

"This rig we've got. It's like a strait jacket, sort of."

"You've used it before?"

"Well, yes—once or twice."

"Why on Bucky?"

"He had this gold— He wouldn't tell us where it was at first."

My God! I thought; Bucky and his gold, his big strike somewhere. "Gold—where?" I said.

"Right here." She raised her head a little. "Around here somewhere."

"If he told you that—why did you kill him?"

"He fought with Milt. He tried to kill Milt. Milt knocked him out. And just then—"

"What?" The pain in her leg was building now.

"This guy in the monkey suit showed up and—Milt hit him on the head."

Her eyes winced and closed and I picked it up from there. "So Milt took the ranger's gun and put it in the ranger's hand and shot Bucky with it, didn't he? Then the two of you carried them down to the ranger's truck, set them up in it, and ran it over the edge. Right?"

"We had to," she said. She opened her eyes wide and tried to sell it to me. "We couldn't do anything else, don't you see?"

I saw. I stood up and gazed down at her with something too close to hate to live with for long. How many times had I heard that plea: "The guy wouldn't give me his money, so I had to kill him. Right?" And we're buying it, a little more each day.

I couldn't think about that. "Where'd you meet Bucky?" I said.

"In this bar in Stockton. He had this little glass thing full of gold— He was bragging about it, Mr. Train."

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Well, he probably was, I thought; there was so little left for him to brag about. I sighed for him just one time. I doubted that he'd fought with Milt. I think that Milt just beat him up for the joy of it, cheered on by this girl. And then the ranger came—the one I'd sent.

"If I take you back, will you tell them all that—the cops?"

"Oh, yes, yes! Just don't leave me here!"

"Promise?"

"I promise, Mr. Train."

I didn't quite grin. She was a pretty girl, good bones in the face and a big bounteous body. Fixed up she'd catch a man's eye quick and dull his good sense. And she would lie; she was born to lie. She'd deny that she and Milt had anything to do with Bucky and the ranger, and that lie might stick. She'd say that I lusted for her and killed Milt to get her—and that would make sense to half of them down there. Otherwise, why would I bring her back? Why not just leave her?

It would be trouble, a tangled, tricky kind of trouble, and in the end some would still believe her. Maybe all of them would. It would take work to clear myself, lots of it, and I didn't come here to work. I came here to fish the Upper Eagle—and not for the like of this.

I looked down at her and said, "I'm gonna leave you here. I can't afford to take the risk."

She knew what I was talking about; her eyes were a mix of pain and guile. She closed them. "I will tell the truth," she said softly. "I'll tell it the way it happened."

"Sure you will," I said. But the decision had been made and there was no going back on it. I went over and put on my half-dry shirt and then I picked her up and draped her over my shoulder. It was about three o'clock, I figured, and it would take me three hours, at least, to get her to town.

I turned her over to the Sheriff at the Mountain City Hospital at 6:30 that evening, and then the trouble started. Just as I knew it would. She told them I'd killed Milt and tried to rape her and she'd broken her leg running away.

It was a week before I cleared myself enough to get back to San Francisco, and the first thing I did was sit down wearily and plan a vacation. Hawaii, maybe.

Next time, count me out.

But they're everywhere you go.

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a *NEW* Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Rand, the former head of the Department of Concealed Communications, the former Double-C man, is retired—or supposed to be. (We never believed for a minute that Rand would really *retire, and we hope nothing ever happens to destroy our faith in the perpetuation and continuity of series characters.) In any event, Rand is called back to complete some unfinished business of the past. Would that old matter never end? Was Rand on a fool's errand to Rome and Moscow? And then the old affair became—as it usually did for counterspies—a dangerous, even a deadly mission . . .*

THE SPY AND THE CATS OF ROME

by *EDWARD D. HOCH*

Rand felt vaguely uneasy sitting in the familiar chair in Hastings' office at British Intelligence. He'd sat there on a thousand prior occasions over the years, but this time was different. He'd retired from the Department of Concealed Communications the previous autumn, and though he'd been involved in one or two cases since then, this was his first visit back to the old building.

"Good to see you again, Rand," Hastings said. "How's your wife?"

"Leila's fine. Teaching archeology at Reading University."

"You live out that way now, don't you?"

"That's right. We have a house west of London, about halfway to Reading. It's an easy drive for her."

"And yourself?"

Rand shrugged. "Writing a book. What everyone does when they retire from here, I suppose."

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"I wanted you to know how much I appreciated your help on that Chessman toy business a few months back."

"You told me so at the time," Rand reminded him. "What is it now?"

"Does it always have to be something?"

"You're too busy a man to invite me down for a mere chat. What is it?"

At that instant Hastings seemed old and bleak. "The sins of our youth catching up with us, Rand. It's Colonel Nelson."

Rand stiffened. That had been—how many years ago?—ten at the very least. Colonel Nelson had been in charge of certain international operations for British Intelligence. He'd lied to Rand about the nature of a Swiss assignment, and some good people had died. Shortly afterward Colonel Nelson suffered a nervous breakdown and was retired from the service. Even after ten years Rand had never forgotten the man and what he did. He'd thrown it up to Hastings in moments of anger, and had cited the affair to younger members of Double-C as a glaring example of what could go wrong if an overseas agent was not in possession of all the facts.

"What about him?" Rand asked.

"We have reports from Rome that he's stirring things up, recruiting white mercenaries to fight in Africa."

"Not on behalf of British Intelligence, surely!"

"No, no, of course not. And I doubt if he's working for the Americans, either. Frankly, we don't know what his game is. But it's most embarrassing at this time."

"Where do I come in?"

"Could you fly down to Rome for a day or two? Just see what mischief he's up to?"

"Oh, come on now, Hastings! I'm out of the service. I helped you on that toy business because—"

"I know, I know. But I don't want to send anyone officially. You know Colonel Nelson. You'd recognize him, even after ten years."

"And he'd recognize me."

"That might be enough to scare him off what he's doing, or at least make him assume a lower profile. You'd be strictly unofficial, but he'd get the message."

"I don't want to be away—" Rand began, still resisting.

"Two nights at most. Certainly your bride could spare you that long."

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Perhaps it was the enforced bleakness of the winter months, or the simple need for activity. Perhaps it was a gnawing sense of unfinished business with Colonel Nelson. Ten years earlier Rand had wanted to kill him. Now, perhaps if he saw the man, he could write a finish to it, finally forget it.

"All right," he said, "I'll go."

Hastings smiled. "I thought you would. I have your plane ticket here."

Rand phoned Leila at the university and explained, as best he could, that he'd been summoned to Rome for two days. "Back at it, aren't you?" she asked accusingly.

"Not really. It's some unfinished business. A fellow I used to work with."

"Be careful, Jeffery."

"Don't worry. I'm through taking chances."

He gathered up some things into an overnight bag and flew to Rome that evening. It was a city he'd visited only briefly in the past, and perhaps his impressions of it were different from most. To him it was not so much a city of churches as a city of fountains and cats.

This night, having settled into a hotel room not far from the Spanish Steps, he took a taxi to a restaurant near the Forum, where the cobblestoned street was cluttered with cats of all sizes waiting to be fed the scraps from the kitchen. Some said the cats had been there since the Fifth Century B.C., when they were imported from cat-worshipping Egypt. They ran wild in many parts of the city, often simply sitting and watching a passerby with a regal indifference that made one believe they might well have inhabited the city for 2500 years.

The restaurant itself was unspectacular. It was called Sabato—Saturday—and perhaps that was the only night it did any business. Certainly on this Thursday night there were plenty of empty tables. Rand saw a few men at the bar—young Italian toughs of the sort that might make good mercenary material. If Colonel Nelson did his recruiting here, business might be good.

A young woman wearing a tight satin skirt and scoop-necked blouse appeared from somewhere to show him to a table. She asked him something in Italian and he answered in English, "I'm sorry. My Italian is a bit rusty."

"Do you wish a menu?" she asked, speaking English almost as

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good as his.

"Thank you, no. My name is Rand. I've come in search of a friend. I understood I could find him here."

"What is his name?"

"Colonel Nelson."

"Ah! The man with the cats!"

"Cats?"

"He feeds them. They trail him down the street when he leaves."

"Does he come here every night?"

"Usually, but you have missed him. He's been and gone."

"I see. You wouldn't happen to know where he lives, would you?"

She shrugged. "Ah, no."

Rand glanced at the line of men standing by the bar. "Any of his friends around?"

"Colonel Nelson's friends are the cats."

"But if he comes in here he must drink with somebody."

"Ask them," she answered, indicating the men at the bar.

"Thank you, Miss—"

"Anna."

"Thank you, Anna."

The first man Rand approached spoke only Italian, but his companion had a knowledge of English. He also had a knowledge of Colonel Nelson. "I take you to him if you want. He lives not far from here."

"Fine. Does he work around here?"

"No, no, he's an old man. He feeds the cats, that is all."

Rand figured Colonel Nelson to be in his early sixties, but the effects of the nervous breakdown might have aged him. Still, it seemed odd that a neighborhood character who fed the stray cats of Rome would be seriously recruiting mercenaries to fight in Africa.

"All right, take me to him."

The man gestured with his hands. "I must pay for the drinks I have."

Rand took the hint and put down a couple of Italian bills. The man smiled, pocketed one of them, and left the other for the bartender. Then he led the way outside, heading down a dim alley lit only by the curtained glow from the restaurant windows.

"How far is it?" Rand asked.

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"Not far from here," the man said, repeating his earlier words, and Rand wondered if he was being set up for a trap. But presently they reached a seedy stone building that obviously contained small apartments, and the man motioned him inside. "I leave you. Sometimes he does not like visitors."

Rand checked the mailboxes—some standing open with their hinges broken—and found one for *Col. A. X. Nelson.* Ambrose Xavier Nelson. Rand hadn't thought of the full name in a decade. He glanced around to thank the man who'd brought him, but the man had already vanished into the night.

The apartment was on the third floor and Rand went up the dim steps with care. The place smelled of decay. Not all that quiet, either, he decided, hearing the noise of a family quarrel from one of the second-floor apartments as he passed it. There was a man's body sprawled on the third-floor landing, and he thought for an instant it was Colonel Nelson, cut down by enemy agents. But it was only a drunk, wine bottle empty at his side, who opened his mouth and snored when Rand turned him over.

He knocked at the door of Colonel Nelson's apartment and waited.

Nothing happened. After a moment he knocked again, harder this time.

Finally a voice reached him from inside. "Who is it?"

"An old friend, Colonel Nelson. I'm in Rome and thought I'd look you up."

The door did not open. "Who is it?" the question was repeated.

"Jeffery Rand, from London."

"Rand. Rand?"

"That's right. Open the door."

He heard latches being undone and bolts pulled back. The heavy oak door opened a crack and a white kitten squeezed out. Then it opened farther, revealing a wrinkled face and balding head. Tired eyes peered at Rand through thick glasses. "I'm Colonel Nelson," the man said. "Why did you come here?"

"To see you. May I come in?"

"All right. The place is a mess."

Two more cats came into view, running across the floor in Rand's path. He lifted a pile of newspapers from a chair and sat down. The place was indeed a mess. "Do you remember me?" Rand asked.

The man opposite him waved his hand. "The memory comes and

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goes. The old days are clouded sometimes. But I think I remember you, yes."

"That surprises me," Rand said, almost casually, "because I've never laid eyes on you before. You're not Colonel Nelson."

The old man smiled then, showing a missing tooth. "Didn't think I could fool you, but I had to give it a try, right?"

"Who are you, anyway? Where's Nelson?"

"He's away. Hired me to take care of his cats and things. My name's Sam Shawburn."

"You're English."

"Sure am! There's a great many of us in Rome, you know. I was with the British Embassy in my younger days. That's how I met old Nelson."

"But this place—!"

"Isn't very tidy, is it? He's fallen on bad times, Colonel Nelson has. Gets a small pension, you know, but not enough to live on."

"Yet he can afford to pay you to stay here while he goes off traveling. That doesn't make sense."

"He was called away on business. He expects to make scads of money and then he says he's going to move to a better place. Maybe take me with him, too."

"I see. Are the cats his?"

"Sure are! They're not mine, I can tell you that. He feeds them in alleys and sometimes they follow him home. He's got close to a dozen around here, maybe more."

"I really would like to see him while I'm in Rome. When's he due back?"

"Who knows? He's been gone a week now."

"I understand he has business connections in Africa."

Sam Shawburn's eyes narrowed. "Where'd you hear that?"

"The word gets around. I heard he was recruiting mercenaries to fight in Africa."

"Old Nelson's a sly one. I wouldn't want to say what he's up to. But I never heard anything about Africa."

"All right," Rand said. "Good talking to you, anyhow. And be sure to tell him I was asking for him."

"Sure will!" the old man said.

Rand left the apartment and went back downstairs. The drunk was gone from the landing now, and he wondered what that meant. Was Colonel Nelson's apartment being watched, and if so

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by whom? Rand hadn't noticed a telephone in the shabby quarters and once he reached the street he decided to wait a few minutes and see what happened. If anything.

Luck was with him. Within five minutes Sam Shawburn left the building and headed down the street, followed by a couple of cats. He might have been taking them for a walk, but Rand was willing to bet he was headed for a telephone.

The streets in that section of the city were all but deserted at night, and it was difficult for Rand to follow too closely. Once or twice he thought he'd lost the trail, but finally he saw Shawburn enter a little tobacco store and make for a telephone in the rear. The cats waited outside, scanning the street for some unseen prey.

He waited until the old man emerged from the shop and stared back down the street. Then Rand crossed quickly to intercept him. "Hello again, Mr. Shawburn."

"What?"

"It's Rand. I wonder if you've been in touch with Colonel Nelson."

The old man took a step backward, as if frightened by the sudden encounter. "No, no, I haven't talked to him."

"Who'd you just call now?"

"When?"

"Just now, in the tobacco store."

"My daughter. I called my daughter."

"Here in Rome?"

"Yes. No—I mean, near here."

"You phoned Colonel Nelson, didn't you?"

The old man's head sagged. "I sent him a telegraph message. I thought he'd want to know."

"Where did you send it?"

"Moscow."

"Colonel Nelson is in Moscow?"

"Yes."

Rand cursed silently. What in hell had he got himself into? The brief favor for Hastings was opening before him like an uncharted swamp. "What's he doing there?"

"I don't know. Business, I guess."

"Where's he staying?"

"I don't know."

"You had to send the telegram somewhere."

Shawburn seemed to sag a bit. "The Ukraine," he replied at

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last. "He's staying at the Ukraine Hotel in Moscow."

There was never any doubt in Rand's mind that he'd be going to Moscow. He phoned Hastings in London to tell him the news and then made arrangements to catch a flight the following morning. As Hastings had quickly pointed out, the possibility of establishing a link between the Russians and the recruiting of African mercenaries was too good an opportunity to be passed over.

Rand had been in Moscow before, in 1970, and he was surprised to see the fresh coats of paint on buildings that had long been neglected. The city was spruced up; it was more modern and lively than he remembered it, and riding down Kalinin Prospekt in the taxi from the airport he might have been in any large city of western Europe. He could see the Gothic spires of the Ukraine Hotel in the distance, looking like some sort of medieval anachronism, contrasting sharply with the modern offices and apartment buildings that lined the thoroughfare. And he couldn't help wondering if his chances of finding Colonel Nelson were any better in a grand Moscow hotel than in the cat-filled alleys of Rome.

The desk clerk at the Ukraine spoke some English, and he knew of Colonel Nelson. "I think he is in the dining room," he told Rand.

The difference in time between Rome and Moscow had made it the dinner hour without Rand's realizing it. He thanked the room clerk and entered the dining room. It was long and fairly wide, with a raised bandstand at the far end and balconies running the length of either side. A huge chandelier hung from the center of the ceiling, adding a surprisingly ornate touch. Most of the side tables were set for large parties, but at one of the small center tables he found Colonel Nelson dining alone. This time there could be no mistake, even after a decade.

"Hello, Colonel."

The old smile greeted him, though the face around it had aged and the eyes above it had taken on a slightly wild look. "Well, Rand—good to see you! I trust your flight from Rome was a pleasant one."

"So Shawburn sent a second telegram."

"Of course! Did you think he wouldn't? The old man is quite faithful."

"Mind if I join you?" Rand asked, already pulling out a chair.

"Not at all!"

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"How's the food here?"

"Predictable. And the service is slow, as in all Moscow restaurants. But I can recommend the soup. It's so thick your fork will stand in it unsupported."

"I'll try some," Rand said with a smile. "What brings you to Moscow, Colonel?"

"Business prospects. Nothing of interest to Concealed Communications, I shouldn't think."

"Oh, I'm retired from there," Rand said casually.

"Are you, now? Then why are you tracking me across Europe?"

"I was in Rome and thought I'd look you up, see how you're doing. I'll admit when I heard you were in Moscow my curiosity got the better of me. Not changing sides after all these years, are you?"

Colonel Nelson glanced around nervously, as if fearing they'd be overheard: "I have no side in London any more. Surely you remember how I was booted out of the service."

"I remember how you lied to me about that Swiss assignment and caused the death of several people."

"We are in the business of lying, Rand. You know that. Didn't Hastings ever lie to you?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Ah, the good gray Hastings! A knight in shining armor! But he's the only one of the old crowd left, isn't he? You and I are out of it—and I hear that even some of the Russians like Taz are gone."

"Taz was blown up in a car shortly before I retired. He made the mistake of coming out of retirement."

Colonel Nelson smiled. "I hope you don't make the same mistake."

Rand leaned forward. "What are you doing here, Colonel?"

"A business matter."

"You're playing a dangerous game. Your apartment in Rome is being watched."

"No doubt by British Intelligence."

Rand decided to lay his cards on the table. "They know you're recruiting mercenaries," he said quietly. A small combo was tuning up on the bandstand, and he doubted if even a directional microphone could have picked up his words.

Colonel Nelson merely shrugged. "There is very little for an aging man to do in my line of work. One must make a living."

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"Are the Russians paying you?"

Nelson thought about the question for a moment, then said, "Look here, Rand, come with me tomorrow morning and see for yourself. It will save you the trouble of following me all day."

"Tomorrow morning?"

"At ten, in the lobby. We're going to Gorky Park. It's the first warm weekend of spring and there's certain to be a crowd there."

He'd been right in his weather prediction, at least. The temperature had climbed to 22 degrees on the Celsius scale, and the park was crowded with strollers. Gorky Amusement Park was located on the Moscow River, a few miles south of the central city. Rand had never been there before, and somehow the sight of the giant Ferris wheel startled him.

"They come here in the winter to ride the ice slide," Colonel Nelson said, "and in the summer to sun-bathe on the hillside. It is a park for all seasons."

"A good place for a meeting," Rand agreed. "Especially on a mild spring weekend."

"The man I'm to meet is named Gregor. Make a note of it if you wish, for Hastings."

"That won't be necessary."

They strolled deeper into the park, past the amusement area to the bank of the river. There were people resting on its grassy shore, and Colonel Nelson said, "It's too cold for swimming except in mid-summer, but they like to wade."

"You know a great deal about Moscow."

"After so many trips it's like London or Rome to me. But come, there's Gregor now."

Gregor was a heavy-set Russian wearing a dull gray suit that seemed too heavy for the weather. Rand's unexpected presence made him nervous, and after a few words in Russian the two of them moved off out of earshot. "You understand, old chap," Colonel Nelson said.

Rand found a bench and sat down, watching some children at play with a fat yellow cat. He couldn't help thinking that the cats of Moscow seemed better fed than those of the Rome alleys. Presently he saw the two men part and Colonel Nelson joined him on the bench. He bent to pet the cat, then sneezed suddenly and sent the creature scurrying into the bushes. "That was simple," he said. "My business in Moscow is finished."

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"You handed him an envelope."

"Down payment. In three weeks' time he will deliver five hundred Russian and East German weapons, mainly automatic rifles."

"You're buying arms here?"

"Of course! What else would bring me to Moscow?"

"For your African mercenaries?"

"Yes," Colonel Nelson answered smugly. "Then if the arms are captured it appears the Russians supplied them."

"Who really supplies them?"

"You know as well as I do, Rand. The British are footing the bill, perhaps with the C.I.A.'s help. I'm still with British Intelligence, you see. I never really left."

"I can't believe—"

"Can't believe what? That Hastings didn't tell you? Good clean Hastings who's always so aboveboard? Hastings knows what I'm doing, all right. He sent you on a fool's errand, going through the motions in the event anyone asked questions later on. I'm working for the British, supplying guns and men to various African factions. You might as well accept it, Rand, because it's true."

Rand was stunned by the words. He didn't want to believe them, didn't want to believe that Hastings had lied to him just as Colonel Nelson had done a decade earlier.

But before he could speak, a man wearing a black raincoat detached himself from the nearby strollers and headed toward them. Rand's first thought was that the man looked vaguely familiar. Then he saw the gun come into view and he thought they were under arrest.

But the gun was a 9mm German Luger, and it was pointed at Nelson's chest. "Volta, Colonel Nelson!" the man shouted, and fired three quick shots.

Rand saw it all as if in slow motion. He saw Nelson topple backward as the bullets tore into his chest, saw the assassin drop the weapon at Rand's feet and disappear into the bushes.

Then Rand was running—knocking screaming women and frightened men from his path, running after the gunman who'd already melted into the crowd on the next footpath. It was impossible to find him, and to most witnesses Rand must have looked like the killer himself. He saw a policeman coming his way, guided by the pointing fingers of the crowd.

He ducked behind a signboard as the officer approached, and

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quickly bought a ticket on the Ferris wheel. As soon as he began his ascent, he spotted the policeman still searching the crowd for him. And higher up, with a view of the entire park, he could see the crowd gathered around the spot where Colonel Nelson's body lay. It was hard for him to believe that the tiny figure at the center of that crowd was Nelson, who'd survived a dozen intrigues to die like this in a Moscow amusement park.

He thought about that, and about Hastings back in London.

Had Hastings really lied to him? Was Colonel Nelson working for British Intelligence all this time, financing his African venture with money from England and possibly from America?

And had the killing of Colonel Nelson been part of the ultimate double-cross?

Rand left the Ferris wheel after three more trips around. The view hadn't answered any of the questions for him, but at least he'd seen Colonel Nelson's body being carried off and he knew the police had stopped searching the immediate area. He took a taxi back to his hotel and was just entering the lobby when he noticed the two men in belted black raincoats talking with the room clerk. This time there could be no mistake. These really were Russian police.

He went back out the revolving door without pausing.

They were looking for him and they knew where to find him.

He was being nicely framed for the murder of Colonel Nelson.

As Rand saw it, there were only two courses of action open to him. He could attempt to leave the country by the first available airliner—and no doubt be stopped and arrested at the gate. Or he could go to the British Embassy and try to get help there. The embassy seemed the better bet. Once inside a Russian prison, he knew he'd be a long time getting out.

He was only a few blocks from the embassy building, and he went on foot. The entrance seemed clear as he approached, but almost immediately two Russian detectives emerged from a parked car to intercept him. "Could you state your business, please?" one of them asked in good English.

"My business is with the British Embassy."

"Could we see your passport?"

"I've lost it. That's why I've come to the Embassy."

"You must understand we are looking for a British citizen

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wanted in connection with a murder. We must ask for identification."

"Are you denying me entrance to my own Embassy?"

The Russian shrugged sadly. "Only until you produce identification. You are still on Russian soil here." He pointed to the ground at his feet, as if daring Rand to step past him.

"All right. I have some identification in my car. I'll go get it." He held his breath as he turned, wondering if the Russians would follow. But their instructions had been to remain at the Embassy entrance, and they only followed him with their eyes. He walked down to the next cross street, where a small Moskvich automobile sat at the curb, its front end hidden from the Russians by a projecting building. Rand bent and pretended to try unlocking the door, then straightened up, shrugged, and made as if to walk around the front of the vehicle to the other side.

As soon as he was out of sight of the Russians he started running, heading down a narrow alley between buildings. He didn't think they'd desert their post to follow him too far, but he wasn't taking any chances.

Finally, panting for breath and fearful of attracting attention, he slowed to a walk as he emerged onto a busy avenue. No one stopped him. For the moment he was safe.

But what should he do now?

Hunted in a strange country for a murder he didn't commit, unable to leave the city or reach the British Embassy, knowing very little of the language, it seemed only a matter of time before he was taken into custody.

He descended into one of the ornate Moscow subways with its gilded chandeliers and sculptured archways and rode to a point not far from the American Embassy. But as he approached he saw a familiar-looking car with two men inside. He kept on walking, wondering how many embassies in Moscow had teams of police watching their doors.

Next he entered a small shop and asked for a public telephone. When he finally made his message clear, the woman behind the counter led him to a telephone—but there was no phone book. He remembered reading somewhere that telephone numbers were hard to come by in Moscow. With some difficulty he might reach the British or American Embassy by phone, but then what? They would hardly risk an international incident by coming into the street to rescue an accused killer. The best they'd offer would be a

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visit to his prison cell after he was arrested.

And what if he was arrested? Even his friends back in London might half believe the charge against him. He'd hated Colonel Nelson for ten years, and that hate might have boiled over into a murderous attack. And though several strollers must have seen the real killer in Gorky Park, Rand was not deceiving himself into believing that any of them would dare come forward to testify. If the government said he was guilty, he was guilty.

He wondered about the man who had really shot Colonel Nelson. Was he in the pay of the Russian, Gregor, who'd accepted his down payment for the weapons and promptly ordered Nelson killed? Or was it a more complex plot than that?

Someone had told the Russians his name, and only Hastings in London had known he was going on to Moscow. Was it possible that Hastings was in on it after all, as Colonel Nelson had insisted?

No. Rand refused to believe that.

The British hadn't been financing Nelson for all these years. He'd bet his life on it.

In fact, he'd bet his life on Hastings.

He took a trolleybus to the Central Telegraph Building and addressed a message to a cover address Hastings maintained in London: *Negotiating early landing shipment of new diesel engines at desirable seaport. Eastern nations don't pose any serious supply problem or route trouble.* He signed it *L. Gaad* and indicated a reply should be sent to him at the Central Telegraph Building.

Rand was certain Hastings would recognize Mrs. Rand's maiden name signed to the wire. And he was betting Hastings could read the very simple steganographic message hidden in it.

But he knew it would be morning before he could expect a reply.

A hotel would ask to see his passport and might even want to keep it. He couldn't sleep in the subway because they closed for maintenance from one to six in the morning. And he knew from his last visit to Moscow that the streets would be empty by ten o'clock. After that there'd be no crowds in which to hide.

Finally, as night was falling, he took the subway out to the end of the line, beyond Gorky Park, and went to sleep on a park bench.

In the morning, hoping his overnight beard wasn't too notice-

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able, he returned to the Central Telegraph Building. Yes, the woman clerk informed him, there was a reply for Mister L. Gaad. She handed over the form and Rand read, with rising spirits: *News of our negotiations received. Every dealer should quote under amount received elsewhere.* It was signed with Hastings' code name.

Rand almost shouted. Hastings had come through. The passport was on its way. He would meet the man and—

Unless it was a trap.

Unless Hastings was setting him up for the Russian police, or for the man who had shot Colonel Nelson.

It was a chance he'd have to take.

The message from Hastings had instructed him to be in Red Square at noon, so he assumed the agent bringing him the fake passport would know him by sight. Red Square at noon, with its lines of tourists waiting to visit Lenin's tomb, could be a very busy place.

There would have been time for an overnight flight from London, Rand knew—or the agent meeting him could be someone from the British Embassy. In any event, they would have to find each other in the crowd.

He reached Red Square a little before noon, wandering aimlessly along the fringes of the crowd waiting at Lenin's tomb. Though he kept his head down, his eyes were alert, scanning the faces he passed, looking for someone familiar.

At ten minutes after twelve he was still looking.

Perhaps Hastings had meant noon of the following day. Perhaps—

"Jeffery," a soft voice said at his shoulder.

He spun around, trying not to appear too startled, and looked into the face of his wife, Leila. "What are you—?"

"Hastings sent me. He knew it had to be someone you trusted. I have a passport in the name of Lawrence Gaad for you. And tickets on an evening flight to London."

"My God, he thought of everything!"

She smiled up at him, and at that moment they might have been the only people in the center of Red Square. "He said to tell you he expected something better from the former head of Double-C than a steganograph with the first letters of each word spelling out the message."

"Sometimes the simple things are the easiest to sneak by. And I

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had to have something that could be read almost at once. But I don't like the idea of his sending you here."

"Jeffery, I once swam the Nile to a boatload of Russian spies! A midnight flight to Moscow is really nothing."

He rubbed the stubble on his face. "Come on. If you don't mind dining with someone who needs a shave, I'll buy you lunch."

They arrived at Sheremetyevo International Airport in the late afternoon to find the usual scene of confusion and delayed flights. Rand asked Leila to check the departure time while he went off to do some checking of his own. He was remembering the words of Colonel Nelson's assassin: "Volta, Colonel Nelson!" It had sounded half Russian then, but he now realized it could have been Italian. *Time, Colonel Nelson!* A time to die.

And if the assassin was Italian—someone who had followed Nelson here from Rome—might not he be returning to Rome?

He confirmed at the information booth that the flight to Rome was six hours late in departing. There was just a chance that—

And then he saw the man.

There was no mistaking him, leaning against the wall smoking a cigarette. He even wore the same black raincoat.

Rand slipped a retractable ballpoint pen from his inner pocket and walked up to the man. Quickly, before he was noticed, he pressed the pen against the skin of the man's neck. "Don't move! Do you understand English? There's a needle in here that could poison you in an instant. You could be dead within a minute. Understand?"

The man was frozen in terror. "Yes. I understand."

"Why did you shoot Colonel Nelson?"

"I—"

Rand pressed harder. "Why?"

"I was paid to."

"By whom? The British?"

Suddenly Rand felt something hard jab him in the ribs, and he realized his mistake. There'd been two of them booked on the flight to Rome. "Let him go, Rand, or you're a dead man," a familiar voice said. "Turn around slowly and drop that pen."

He turned and stared into the deadly eyes of old Sam Shawburn.

It was then Rand remembered where he'd seen the gunman before. "He was the drunk on the landing outside your apartment!"

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Sam Shawburn smiled. "Tony here? Yes, that's right. He was just leaving when he heard you climbing the stairs, so he went into his act. We work well together."

"And you had Colonel Nelson killed."

"A matter of necessity. The African business was becoming too complex—and too profitable to share with a partner. One of us had to go, and I simply acted first, before he got the notion of killing me. I thought murdering him in Moscow was a stroke of genius. It presented so many more possible suspects, including yourself, than did Rome."

"I should have known. Someone tipped off the Russian police and I thought of Hastings. But you knew I'd come to Moscow too—you'd even warned Colonel Nelson of my arrival. You followed me here, had Tony shoot Nelson, and gave the Russians my name. It was easy for them to locate my hotel and to place guards at the embassies."

"Very good!"

"And that wasn't Colonel Nelson's apartment. Those weren't his cats," Rand said, remembering the sneezing in Gorky Park. "Colonel Nelson was allergic to cats."

"True."

"You fed the cats and you recruited the mercenaries for Africa, using Nelson's name."

"His business was buying the guns in Moscow, but I found it safer to use his name for the entire operation."

"How will you get the guns now?"

"Gregor will still deliver. He has contacts and he likes money."

Rand had to know one more thing. "The British? Are they financing the operation?"

"The British?" Shawburn laughed. "Not a chance! Did Nelson tell you that? It was his daydream that he still worked for British Intelligence. He couldn't face that he was living a grubby existence in the back streets of Rome. We were in it on our own."

"What now? Will you try shooting me within earshot of five hundred people?"

"Outside," Shawburn decided. "Walk between Tony and me. No tricks now!"

They were almost to the outer doors, walking fast, when Leila was suddenly upon them. There were two burly Russian policemen with her and she was yelling, "Stop those men! They're kidnaping my husband!"

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Shawburn tried to pull the pistol from his pocket but he was old and slow. The Russians were on them, and it was over.

Rand and Leila didn't catch the London plane that evening.

It took two days and several telephone calls to London, plus a visit by the British ambassador, to free them from the endless rounds of questioning. By that time the Russians had found Gregor's address in Sam Shawburn's wallet and learned all about the illegal arms deal. They seemed more interested in that aspect of the case than in the murder of Colonel Nelson, but it was enough to insure that Shawburn and Tony would be spending a long time in Russian prisons.

Finally, flying back to London, Rand said, "You saved me twice in one day. I'm beginning to think I should have had you around all my life."

Leila smiled and leaned her head back on the seat. "If you're going to keep on doing little favors for Hastings, you'll need me around."

"Q"

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